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Hugh Melton.

BY KATHARINE KING

CHAPTER I.

CHUMS.

"COME, Melton, lay down your block, and let us have a little chat; I'm sick of whipping the water, as I've been doing the whole morning without success.

What do you think of our new quarters?" I was just winding up my line while speaking; for, as I said, I had been fishing the whole morning without success, and had now returned to the place where I had left Melton sketching a few hours before.

We belonged to the detachment that had just been quartered at M—, a pretty town in one of the midland counties; and I being infatuated about fishing, while my companion was equally so about sketching, we had gone out on an excursion, combining the two objects to our mutual gratification.

It was a lovely day in June; the little river by which we were sitting came tumbling down from a line of hills that rose blue before us in the sunny distance, and the trees in their young bright green dipped their branches into the dark foam-flecked water that had not yet calmed into its ordinarily quiet flow, after falling over a splendid mass of rocks that rose in rugged grandeur a little way above.

It was this fall Melton had been sketching, and as I now looked over his shoulder I could not refrain from an exclamation of surprise and delight. The fall, with its mixture of graceful beauty and wild majesty, was charmingly rendered by his clever hand; the little flecks of light on the foaming waters, the gleam that danced

on the top of a small birch tree that clung to an overhanging rock in the middle of the torrent, the white upturned surface of the leaves tossed sideways by the gentle breeze, were all given; and there in the still pool at the side you could see the wavering outline of the stones as the water rippled over them. In the foreground, too, Melton was just putting in, by a few masterly touches, your humble servant, as he appeared standing disconsolately on the bank of the stream, winding up his line with an intensely disappointed face that sunny June morning.

"There, I have just finished," he said, answering my appeal, and putting away his block, washing out his brushes, and otherwise making himself ready for a quiet chat; for it was a curious thing about Melton, that whenever he could get a pencil or a brush, he could not refrain from using it, and if he began to use it he soon got so absorbed as not to be able to attend to anything else. Therefore he now put brushes and pencils away, so as to enable him to devote his whole attention to the little chat I had desired.

"What do I think of our quarters, you asked me," he went on. "I like them; the town is clean and neat, the barracks are comfortable, and, above all, the scenery is very pretty. I shall luxuriate in sketching while we remain here."

"Yes," I answered, rather pettishly, "that's all you think about; but the fishing is beastly, at least as far as I have seen to-day, and the hunting season is such a long way off that there is no comfort in looking forward to it; while I haven't a chance of getting off after the grouse this year to while away the intermediate time."

"My dear fellow, I really am sorry for your want of success this morning, and I dare say you'll do better next time; and if you'd take my advice, you'd try again after lunch with a lighter fly. Stay, you have a few feathers with you; pass



MAUD'S FAREWELL TO HUGH MELTON.

them over here, and I'll tie you one I think will do."

I did as he told me, and feeling sorry for having spoken so crossly to him, I watched his nimble fingers as he proceeded to dress a very artistic-looking fly.

"Now," said he, as he finished, "try that in the dark pool over there, and I think it will rise something before long; but first let us take our lunch now we are together."

We lay down in the shade, feeling very lazy and luxurious; and while we are discussing the sandwiches of which our lunch consisted, let me tell you who Hugh Melton was, and also a little of his history, besides describing his personal appearance for the benefit of my lady friends.

First, then, his appearance, which I hope may not disappoint you, though I do not know that he was so much handsome as distinguished looking. He was unmistakably a gentleman, and, by-the-way, it is not every one even among those who really can lay claim to the title that looks so nowadays; tall and well knit, with good hands and feet, and a face that I never thought of calling handsome, though I always admired it more than any other I had ever seen. Imagine a square broad brow surmounted by wavy light hair, from under which looked out dark hazel eyes, usually soft and caressing in expression, though I have seen them flash with the light of hate and defiance.

For the rest, his nose could lay claim to no particular type, and his long fair mustache hid a mouth from which gleamed a very perfect row of teeth. There was great determination and inflexible will in the straight eyebrows and square-cut jaw; and one could imagine that his mind once made up on any subject, he would not easily be induced to change it. Altogether, his would not have been the pleasant face it was but for the rare softness and sweetness of the dark eyes, that seemed to caress one with a look, and that always made me wonder how our colonel could have the heart to be down on him when those grave gentle eyes met his. As to his story, it was sad enough, as I then knew it, namely, that he was the only son of very poor parents; in fact, his mother's had been a runaway match, and her relatives, wealthy people, totally refused to have anything to say to her as long as her husband lived; yet for that matter they might well have been proud of the connection, as he was, though poor, of old and noble family. He died, however, when Hugh was about fourteen, and then one of his mother's brothers condescended to give her a small yearly income and schooling for him for a year or two, so that in time he passed for the army, and was gazetted to the —th. He had been for some years with us now, and his old uncle had purchased two steps for him, so that at the time I am speaking of he was some way up in the list of the captains. Our colonel, however, had never liked him. We were a somewhat fast regiment, and it bored him to have a poor man among us. And Hugh certainly was poor; for though his uncle purchased his steps, he made him no allowance, and evidently considered that he should keep up with all the follies and extravagancies of a crack regiment on his pay. So the colonel snubbed him, and was perpetually down on him, trying to force the unfortunate fellow to exchange, which, however, Hugh would not do, partly because he liked some of us very warmly, and chiefly because our home service was nearly up, and he would have had to pay a good sum of money to induce any one to exchange with him. This he had not to give, because, as I have said, he had nothing but his pay, and what he could get for a few cleverly dashed off magazine articles. He managed in this way to keep himself out of debt and make both ends meet; but it was very hard work, and I often pitied him when I saw him consuming the midnight oil over those clever sketches we used to laugh at afterward in the *United Service Magazine*. He was a capital artist too, and that helped his pocket a little. Still he was kept hard at work to get a little ready cash, and it wasn't much when it did come. As we lay there lazily under the trees, I calmly

puffing away at my pipe, he as ever dashing in a hasty sketch of our shady resting-place (he seldom smoked, and he had always a pencil in his hands), I asked him what it was old Crusty (our irreverent name for Colonel Armstrong) had to say to him that morning when they were closeted such a long time together.

He laughed—his gay careless laugh. "Poor Old Crusty, how he hates me! I quite feel for him. It really is a pity to have a fine corps like this spoiled by one penniless vauren; but really it is just my being so penniless that keeps me here, else I think I would try and oblige him. However," he added, "what do you think he was saying this morning? You'd never guess, so I may as well tell you. It seems my mother, who is still handsome, and goes out a good deal, is thinking of marrying again. Now the person she has chosen is a merchant in the City, very wealthy; but the connection does not suit my uncle's taste, and he has sent me a message through the colonel, who is a great friend of his (being doubtless afraid to broach the subject himself), that if I write to my mother, refusing my consent to her marriage, and farther saying that in the event of her persisting in her determination, I must decline having anything more to say to her, he will then not only purchase all my future steps, and make me the very handsome allowance of £800 per annum, but also declare me his heir. That's a bribe worth having, Charlie," he continued, turning toward me, and speaking in a light tone that belied the fierce flash in his eye and the dark frown on his broad brow.

"What did you say? is the question," I replied, thinking, however, that I knew the answer pretty well.

"I told the colonel," answered Hugh, "that it was very well my uncle had sent his message by him; for if he had come in person, I doubted much if I could have refrained from the pleasure of throwing him out of the window. The request alone would have deserved such an answer, still more the bribe."

"And what did Armstrong say?"

"Oh, he pooh-poohed my sentimentalism, as he was pleased to call it, and laid before me all the advantages of being friends with my uncle and pocketing his £800; what a figure it would enable to make me in the regiment, and all the rest of it. Then, seeing me unmoved by that, he went on to state that in the event of my refusing to do as he wished, my uncle had determined to have nothing more to do with me, but to leave me in future to sink or swim, as best I could. To that I replied, that while I repudiated the charge of sentimentalism, it was my earnest wish to try and do what I saw manifestly to be my duty, and that in no way could I feel it to be my duty to prevent my mother providing herself with a comfortable home in her old age to gratify my uncle's pride. My duty lies to her, not to him; and while I consider her quite right in the course she has chosen, if she loves the man she intends to marry, I can in no way perceive the right either of my uncle's interference or the manner of it."

"Well done, old fellow! I knew you were true steel," I answered, raising myself on my elbow and looking at him, wishing the while I had his own gift with the pencil, that I might transfer that animated countenance, with its sparkling, flashing look of defiance and disdain, to paper. What a splendid fellow he is, and how he must have electrified Old Crusty, if he looked and spoke like that to him! I thought as, having finished my pipe, I rose to try Melton's fly in the place he had recommended. He took up his position for another sketch, and we both went to work. I had not been long at it when I got a bite, and soon was very busy playing a remarkably fine trout. He was a big one—over ten pounds' weight—so that it took me some time to land him, when, greatly encouraged by my success, I continued whipping the water diligently, and in two or three hours had taken about half a dozen fine trout.

"Why, Cairnsford, that's splendid!" said Hugh's voice close to me, as I landed my last, a fine three-pounder. "What luck you have

had! One doesn't often get such sport as that."

"Nor should I to-day if you had not given me that fly. How is it, old fellow? You know everything, and yet one never sees you shooting or fishing."

"I used to go in for both once on a time, when we lived in Ireland, before my father's death. I was very young then, but the little knowledge I picked up about such things has staid by me, and I am very glad it has been of use to you to-day, Charlie. Now you can take the conceit out of that stupid fool, Southman, who is always talking about his doings in Norway, and who has not hooked a minnow here yet."

"Yes, I shall enjoy taking that fellow down a peg or two. I can't stand his airs; neither for that matter can Old Crusty, though the fellow is made of gold I do believe; which shows that after all our colonel has some sense in him, if he'd let it get an airing now and then." With which complimentary speech I shouldered my basket; and Hugh having already got his traps together, we set out on our way back to town.

I went into Melton's room on our return to barracks, and while he was washing out his brushes and palette, settling his paint-box, and otherwise fiddling about—like the old bachelor I always told him he would be—I amused myself looking over a portfolio of sketches which stood on a chair by the window. They were most of them views of places where we had been stationed lately, and I knew by a cross in the corner of many of them that Hugh had copied them for sale; for, as I said before, Melton eked out his scanty pay by the produce of his art, as he was wont proudly and fondly to call it. At last I came to a more finished picture, which riveted my attention for some time; so that I did not observe Hugh, who came quietly up behind me, and looked over my shoulder for a little while without speaking. It was a portrait of a young girl that had so taken my fancy, and underneath was written in dear old Hugh's handwriting, "*Fais ce que dois adienne que pourra.*" The face itself was very pretty, with an expression half earnest, half laughing, great sweetness in the smile, and a very *malin* twinkle in the eye. To crown all, the head was surrounded by a perfect halo of deep golden hair, not in any way approaching to red, but pure sunny golden, with a dash of brown in the shadows.

As I have said, Melton came and looked over my shoulder, without my being aware of his approach; so that I was rather startled when I heard his voice beside me saying, "Did you never see that before. What do you think of it?"

"It is a charming face," I answered. "Tell me who was the original, and why you have appended such a very sage motto to so fascinating a beauty."

His face fell perhaps ever so slightly as he replied, "You often laugh at me for what you call my high principles and strict adherence to what I conceive to be my duty; you will perhaps be surprised when I tell you I owe those ideas to her."

"I should never have guessed it," I replied; "the face looks mirthful rather than serious. How came she by such methodistical opinions!"

"I don't mind telling you all about it, Cairnsford, though I would not tell every one; but this is how I became acquainted with her, and how she came to give me advice. A good many years ago now, soon after I first joined, I was quartered near M—, in Ireland, and as there were never many officers in that part at a time, the few who did go there were entertained very hospitably and made much of. There was in particular one gentleman, a Mr. Meares, who lived in a small place near M—; he had one daughter, this girl whose portrait you see here."

"What," I exclaimed, interrupting him, "is that Miss Meares the heiress, of whom I have heard so much?"

"Yes," he answered. "At that time they were poor enough: since then, however, she has come into a large property, and is one of the

richest heiresses in England. However, as I was saying, at that time they lived near M—, and I was a frequent visitor at her father's house. I need hardly tell you the owner of that face was clever, original, and spirited, without being in the least fast; she could dance and ride quite as perfectly as most Irish girls do—some, indeed, thought she excelled most of them in those accomplishments—and besides many other talents possessed no mean skill with her pencil. You may imagine that I, then young and impressionable, easily fell under the spell of her beauty and accomplishments; I spent almost my whole time at Belvoir (their place), and her mother, a charming, handsome woman, seemed to see no harm in our intimacy. Day by day we went out sketching about the place, never going far from the house, but as the scenery around was lovely, always finding plenty to do. I, though acting as instructor on these occasions, often found myself hard put to it to equal my pupil's productions; and from day to day her winning, sprightly ways and clever, amusing conversation made me more and more deeply in love with her. For her society, and in order that I might sit near her and watch her, and for the hope of touching her hand at meeting and parting, I now neglected everything; my duties were shirked whenever I could prevail on any one to undertake them, and my art, of which before I had been a devoted student, was now entirely thrown aside, except during the sketching expeditions I have spoken of. Once or twice in that happy time I found Miss Meares looking at me with a curious, half-puzzled, half-anxious expression, and I wondered what brought so troubled a look to her sunny face, half-hoping and half-fearing I must be the cause of it. Happiness such as I then enjoyed was, however, too great to last, and for some days I saw the cloud approaching which was to blot out all the fair dreams I had woven for myself during those long bright summer days. Latterly Maud—for I had begun to dare to call her so in my own thoughts—had appeared sad and disheartened, rousing herself with an evident effort to laugh at the merry sallies I now and then made in the vain hope of dispelling her melancholy. I was pained at this, as I always was pained by anything that caused her sorrow; and as her manner toward me had a tinge of mournful tenderness in it, I determined to take courage, and speak the decisive words that should settle at once the position we must in future occupy toward each other.

"It was one fine bright morning, when, as usual, I had come over armed with my sketching apparatus, that I came to this resolution. For some little time she had appeared to avoid these excursions, once so pleasant to both of us, and that day, when I came toward her in the garden, she said, with the gentle, joyous smile which of late I had seen so often on her radiant face, 'I don't think I can sketch to-day; I don't feel inclined for a walk.'

"Upon this I spoke. 'Why is it,' I said, 'that you are never inclined to walk out now, or sketch either, even those views which are close to the house? Have I done anything to annoy you? You are so changed to me lately.'

"'No, indeed,' she replied, earnestly, 'you have never annoyed me;' and then she turned to a rose-bush beside her, and began cutting off the withered leaves, and putting them into a basket that hung on her arm.

"'If I have not annoyed you, why, then, are you so altered of late?' I persisted. 'You don't know what pain the least coldness in your voice and look causes me. I will not bear it any longer. I will speak and tell you.'

"'Hush!' she said, turning round so as to face me, while holding up her hand with a warning gesture—'hush! I know what you are going to say. Don't think me unwomanly or forward because I tell you before you speak that I know what you intended to say. For some days I have seen that it must come to this, and I have been turning over in my mind how I could best spare you the pain of saying—myself the pain of listening to—what will do neither of us any good, and must cause us trouble and grief.

Stay,' she continued, with a pretty imperious gesture, as I was about to interrupt her eagerly, 'you must hear me to the end patiently: I won't keep you long. I think the best thing for both of us will be for you to know a little more of my past life than you at present do. It is—here she paused for a moment, and I thought a tinge of color crept into her pale cheeks; but with an effort she after a minute tossed her head with a pretty impatience I had often admired, and went on—'it is this: Years ago, when I was a very little child, an old friend of my father's died, and on opening his will it was found that he had bequeathed the whole of his immense property to me when I should have attained the age of twenty-one years, on condition I should marry a nephew of his, a Mr. Cameron by name; until then the property is rigidly tied up, not a penny being spent on me, but everything being allowed to accumulate. About a week ago my father told me this Mr. Cameron, who has until lately been out with his regiment in India, is on his way home to claim the fulfillment of the compact entered into years ago by his father and mine. I shall be twenty-one in a few weeks now, and my father, who has long been obliged to live in great poverty to provide me with a good education and those few comforts which our means afford, is now naturally anxious to enter on the enjoyment of this fortune, and insists on giving this young man such a promise as shall insure our possession of the property, though it will not be necessary for me to marry at once. I can now only beg of you, Mr. Melton, not to judge hardly of me for having in this matter taken the initiative, and overstepped those boundaries of reserve usually observed by women; my only excuse is that I hoped to save you pain.'

"'But,' said I, when he had finished speaking, 'do you consider this fortune worth more than the love I have to offer you? You guessed aright what I had to say. I do love you; but if you prefer a miser's gold to the earnest, faithful affection I feel for you, then I would not utter one word to induce you to alter your choice, for in that case you are not worthy to be my wife, or to take the first place by right in my heart, which you have already usurped there.' I spoke defiantly and bitterly, for it seemed to me from the firm, decisive way in which she spoke that she had made her choice, and, that loving me as much as her cold heart could, she yet preferred the gold.

"She answered faintly, 'Sit down; I want to talk this over with you. I have no one to whom I can go for counsel: my father and mother both have but one opinion on the matter; now I will hear yours, and try to decide between them. My earnest desire is to do what is right; but now I don't see the right. I am like a person wandering in a strange place in thick darkness—I see nothing; and when I stretch out my hands for something to lean on, I find only empty space.'

"'How can you hesitate a minute!' I answered, boldly and hotly, thinking I was sure of victory, and pressing on with an eagerness that perhaps caused my failure. 'Is it not your duty if you love me, and knowing I love you, to give up everything for the sake of completing and filling my life, as well as insuring happiness to your own? Plainly your first duty is to the man you love.'

"'Yes, if he were my husband,' she answered; 'but until then all my duty lies to my parents, and their commands are strong on me; besides, I could not marry without their consent. Yes,' she added, with a dreamy far-off look, 'I see my duty now; they have sacrificed themselves for me while I was helpless and they were strong; it is my turn to sacrifice myself for them now that they are getting old and want the comforts they have denied themselves hitherto. And you too,' she continued, turning and looking at me, with a kind of enthusiasm lighting up her face—'you too have some object in life, some duty to perform, other than spending your days in careless enjoyment. With your talents you might be famous, and confer a benefit on your fellow-men; and yet how little you have achieved! See, I will con-

fer a greater boon on you than if I had granted your request: take for your guide through life my motto, *Fais ce que dois adviene que pourra.*'

"'I will take no advice from you,' I answered, angrily. 'You yourself deliberately disobey your fine precept; you have determined to sell yourself for gold; for you love me—you know you do.' Then, as anger and grief mastered me, I went on boldly and madly, 'Only say you love me, and that you would marry me if you could; it will be some poor comfort for me to take with me into my banishment.'

"She opened her mouth to speak, and I leaned forward, listening breathlessly for the avowal my heart told me would follow; but after an instant she shook her head, and said, 'You would, indeed, have cause to reproach me for not keeping my precept if I answered you. It is precisely because I ought not that I will not reply to your question. How should I be acting toward Mr. Cameron, whose promised wife I am, if I spoke with you any more on this subject? Good-by, Mr. Melton. Some time, when you have ceased to regret this—and you will soon do so, for you are still young—then you may come and see me, and we shall be the good friends I would wish us to be; but until you feel you can regard me in that light it would be better we should not meet again.' She held out her hand to me, but I, maddened by jealousy and disappointed love, bowed coldly to her and turned away. At this insult I saw, as I turned slowly from her, her large eyes filled with tears, and a pitiful pleading expression came into her face as she made one step toward me. I would have turned again, but before I could do so she had run quickly away, and was already disappearing among the thick shrubberies surrounding the house.

"Long afterward, when I could think calmly over the whole affair, I began to see that, perhaps, looked at from her point of view, she had been more in the right than I had at first thought; and it was then I painted that picture with the motto underneath, and that motto I have ever since tried to follow as my guide. I fear I follow it but badly; but, as she said then one so often finds it difficult to know the right. A faint glimmer of light, however, there generally is, which guides one in some degree, and for the rest the will must make up for the deed."

SOME time after this we were ordered to headquarters at Aldershot, and found there a Captain Cameron, who had lately joined, and who took care soon to let us know that Miss Meares, the heiress, was his promised bride. Even if I had not heard Hugh's story I should have disliked this man, who was not only insignificant in appearance, but seemed equally contemptible in mind. A little fair man, with scanty yellow whiskers and mustache, and dapper person, always neatly dressed; not bad-looking perhaps, but for the sinister underhand expression in his light blue eyes. I often wondered how Hugh felt toward him, as he sat glowering at him from under his bent brows across the table at mess; but indeed, I need not have wondered, for his feelings were often too plainly visible on his face to need any expression in words, and the new arrival very soon became aware that for some reason or other "that dark-looking fellow, Hugh Melton" (as he called him), bore him no good-will. The time now drew near when some steeple-chases which we had got up were to come off; and throughout the whole camp nothing was talked of but the merits of the respective horses and their riders. There was one horse in especial that all the judges declared must win, if only his abominable temper could be kept under, or got rid of for the day; but even his greatest admirers were afraid to trust their money on so ill-tempered a brute. Templeton of "ours" was to ride him; and in this fact lay the consolation to his backers, for they thought if any man in the service could master him it was that dashing "light weight."

Every one who has once seen Templeton sit-

ting back on his chestnut thorough-bred, his hands well down and his head up, riding in the first flight with the Pychley, or, better still, flying along in the front at the Grand Military, will recollect him: a small, spare, boyish-looking young fellow, with pale, fair complexion, large, prominent blue eyes, drooping mustache, and a *nil-admirari* expression of countenance. But to those of my lady friends who may not have seen him in his favorite career, let me recall the same slight figure leaning languidly against the wall in a ball-room, looking so intensely bored that you are reminded of a death's-head at a feast, and long to ask him why he came there, when the festive scene seems so little to his taste. You must have seen and pitied him, gentle reader; recall him to your mind's eye now, and have before you the intended rider of Spitfire (so the horse was called).

Cameron, who, by-the-way, hardly knew a horse from a cow, had a pot of money on him; so had Southman and one or two more. I didn't like his temper, and so backed Jack Masterman, the second favorite, for a small sum. The race was to come off on Wednesday, the 23d of July; but on the Friday before, as we came into mess, I observed an unusual excitement on Southman's generally stolid face, and on looking round, perceived that Cameron, Templeton, and Hemmings, the owner of Spitfire, were all absent.

"What's up?" I inquired of Percy Langham, who sat next me.

"Why, haven't you heard? That idiot Templeton has gone and sprained his wrist with those confounded gymnastics he was always bothering about, and so Spitfire must either be scratched, or some one else must be got to ride him. They do say that Cameron has nearly gone out of his mind since he heard of Templeton's accident; and I hear he will be ruined if that horse doesn't win. He has gone now to the stables to find Hemmings, who went over there some time ago, and they say that he intends to ask permission to ride the horse himself sooner than let him be scratched."

"But why? Wouldn't it be much better for him if the horse was withdrawn? He could then make a new book, or he needn't make any at all."

"Oh, that's just the pith of the whole thing. I believe he's dipped tremendously, and the Jews are down on him; so that if he doesn't land something now, he goes to the wall entirely. As to his not making another book, that is because he fancies himself secure on that horse, and doesn't care for any of the others. Southman's as bad." Langham recounted all this in an undertone, with a rather pleased twinkle in his eye; he did not at all fancy the Cameron and Southman clique.

"But," said Hugh, who was on the other side of me, and who had been listening attentively, "can Cameron ride at all? I never fancied he did much in that line."

"No," laughed Langham; "that's what makes it so curious. Some say that Spitfire will kill him, others that the horse will be killed; at any rate, Cameron's safe for a crumpler."

Hugh turned away his head quickly, and appeared to be busy with his dinner; but Southman, from the opposite side of the table, cried out: "Did you ever hear of such folly as Cameron's wanting to ride that brute Spitfire? He's safe to be killed. I'm as good a rider as he, and I've as much on the race as he; but if it was as much again, I wouldn't ride that animal."

"Shows that his physical courage is of a higher order than yours. We won't presume to compare your moral qualities, Southman," said Langham, laughing quietly. He was a young fellow who had not long joined, universally liked for his gay good humor, but a most inveterate dealer in chaff and badinage, neither friend nor foe escaping his gay sallies.

Southman, wrapped safely from all covert stings in an impenetrable armor of self-conceit, answered, quietly: "No; physical courage is well enough in its way, but without being properly balanced by moral courage it degenerates

into foolhardiness and rashness. Now if Cameron had a degree of moral courage at all apportioned to his physical bravery, he would reflect that it would be much better to bear a little dunning from the Jews, or, even though that is a disagreeable alternative, to be whitewashed, rather than run the risk of breaking his neck."

"But suppose he was to be whitewashed out of his rich future's recollection," said Langham, inquiringly.

"Ah, there now is a case that requires judgment. That is just a situation in which I could show to advantage; I would show you how to steer through those difficulties in a manner that would astonish you," answered Southman.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel, who at the head of the table was beginning to look rather electrified at Southman's philosophical turn of mind, "suppose we go out and smoke a cigar; you can resume this interesting discussion at a future period."

We all rose and dispersed in different directions, I lighting a cigar, and intending to go out for a quiet stroll, to think over some family news I had that day received. I had not gone far, however, before I heard Hugh's voice calling after me, "Stop, Cairnsford; why are you in such a hurry? I want you to walk with me."

I turned, and as he came up I noticed a singularly white-set look in his face; the straight dark brows overhung gloomy, unfathomable eyes, in which a kind of restless, troubled look gleamed at intervals, and the firm, determined mouth expressed even more than its ordinary share of indomitable will.

"Come with me to find Hemmings, there's a good fellow, Charlie," said he, as he came up and took my arm.

"What," I exclaimed, "you surely don't mean that you are going to offer to ride that brute Spitfire! That's to save that fellow Cameron the fall he so richly deserves. I'll lay anything."

"Oh, Cairnsford," began Hugh, in a hurried, troubled manner, "you don't know how I felt when Southman was talking about it at dinner. I was tempted sorely then; something kept whispering to me, 'Leave him alone and let him be killed, since he chooses to run the risk; it's none of your business; and when he's out of the way there'll be nothing between you and Maud.' It was dreadful, Charlie," he went on, growing more white and worn-looking as the remembrance of that fierce mental conflict again overcame him; "but now my mind is made up, and there is only this course open to me."

"But," I argued, "how in this are you following out your favorite motto? How can you make out in any one way that it is your duty to run the risk of having your neck broken to save Captain Cameron's?"

"Why, it is as plain as daylight," he answered. "If Cameron is killed, it brings grief and sorrow on one whom I love better than myself, and whom, therefore, it is my duty to shield from all evil; for, mind you, I hold that we owe a duty to those we love, whether they love us or not. And then, again, if he dies I shall as surely be his murderer as if I had committed the deed, for in my heart I wished for his death; therefore I must offer to ride this horse, and the sooner I have done it and got it over the better."

I saw he was determined, so said nothing more, but walked down to the stables where the much-talked-of steed was at present staying. There we found Captain Cameron in close consultation with Hemmings, with whom Hugh immediately opened the conversation.

"This is a bad business about Templeton, Hemmings; how do you intend to manage about the horse?"

"I hardly know," answered Hemmings. "Cameron here wishes to ride him; but I am inclined to think it is not only useless but dangerous, to let anyone ride him who doesn't know him thoroughly."

"I came down to offer my services," said

Hugh, laughing; but it seems you have quite *l'embaras de richesses* in the way of riders now; so perhaps."

"Well, if you really feel inclined to undertake riding him," interrupted Hemmings, quickly, "I think you would be about the most likely person I could meet with. I remember seeing you out in the Quorn country once or twice on a very ugly brute of a horse, that would have brought most people to grief; so that if any one but Templeton can make anything of Spitfire, you are the man."

"Will you really ride him, Melton?" asked Cameron. "That is most kind of you. I have a great deal on him, and it would have put me out dreadfully if he had been scratched. When do you intend to try him?"

"Well, it is rather late now—about half-past eight, I should think; still, if you don't mind, Hemmings, I'll take him out now and see how he goes with me. You can come, too, if you like, Cameron. I know a nice, retired spot, where we can get a good gallop without being observed," answered Hugh; "and you, Cairnsford, bring out Jocelyn, for I may want you to give me a lead over the first fence. And now let's look at the animal. I may want him saddled and bridled differently from the usual way when I know what his tricks are."

Hugh's spirits seemed to have risen as soon as his perilous offer had been accepted, and I could not help thinking that though in the first instance duty had made him volunteer, yet now the excitement of approaching danger was beginning to exert its influence on his spirit, and he would not have backed out of the scrape if he could. We now entered the stable where this redoubtable animal was to be seen. There he was in a commodious, loose box; and in truth, though knowing what I did of him, I could hardly restrain myself from echoing Hugh's cry of delight. He was a magnificent liver-colored chestnut, with tawny mane and tail, small, blood-like head, a broad forehead conspicuously marked by a large white star, full, clear, wild eyes, with a wicked roll in them, large, wide-open nostrils, and long, restless ears. Altogether, his face was a picture, beautiful to look at, but promising bad times to his adventurous rider. Add to this a neck fine and light where it joined the head, but swelling into a massive crest and running into a powerful sloping shoulder, broad, oval hind-quarters of immense power; a magnificently developed chest, and flat, sinewy legs, completed the *coup d'œil* of the finest horse I ever saw. No wonder Cameron felt sure of his money on him; no wonder Hugh felt a thrill of delight at the thought of riding such a superb creature, and began to think his sacrifice was no sacrifice at all.

There he stood, looking wonderingly at his unknown visitors, turning now and then, as if for protection, to the stable-man, who stood near him with the clothing, that had just been removed, over his arm. Hugh, after a few minutes' admiring pause, advanced to take him by the headstall; to this Spitfire, though he retreated a little before him at first, offered no great objection, and Hugh proceeded to examine him more closely. After a few seconds he asked:

"What bit do you ride him with?"

"A twisted snaffle, sir," answered the man; "he's an orkerd temper, sir, and pulls like a good un when he gets his spirit up, though at times his mouth is too fine. This is the way of it, sir: if you pull him he'll rear up and fall atop of you, as sure as eggs is eggs; but if he pulls you, and you can't manage to stop him some way, he'll take you wherever he chooses to go, and that's most like to be the shortest way home."

"Ah, very likely," answered Hugh; "but I don't intend to let him get his own way. I shall try a plan of my own with him."

He then proceeded to give his own directions for the bridling of this formidable mount. "Now," he said, when he had finished his instructions, "we'll see how he will work in that tackle."

"Well," said Hemmings, when he had done speaking, "I think you intend to break your

neck, Melton; I hardly like to let you ride him in that gear."

"Make yourself easy, my dear fellow," answered Hugh; "I rode one like him before, who had puzzled a good many people. I found my plan perfectly successful with Rough Diamond, the horse you saw me riding in the Quorn country, and I can at least try it on this one, who seems to have a similar temper."

This explanation satisfied Hemmings, and a few minutes after, our horses having appeared and Spitfire being now ready, we mounted and set off along the London road. When we had ridden two or three miles out of camp, Hugh pointed out to me a low hedge to the left-hand side of the road.

"Now," said he, "over with you; we'll go through these fields, leave that farm-house to the right-hand side, and then we come to a splendid range of pasture land, up to the top of the hill yonder. Are you ready?"

I went at the fence, and Jocelyn, a grand old hunter, who, if all the horses in England were balking round him, would not mind them, went over calmly, knowing full well that there were no hounds out any where near, and therefore it was not worth his while to get excited. Once over, I turned to watch Hugh, who put Spitfire straight at it, intending to follow. It was no use, however; as he neared it the ill-tempered brute wheeled round short, and on Hugh's trying to turn him at it again, began a violent battle, in which, however, the fighting was all on his side, Hugh remaining perfectly quiescent, it being above all a distinguishing feature of his riding that he never lost his temper, no matter how troublesome his mount might be.

"At it you, Cameron," Melton called out, turning away and leaving room for the other to pass him; "he may be more inclined to follow when you are over."

Cameron did as he was told; but I fear from the sample he gave us of his riding he would have had a poor chance on the chestnut; as it was, he barely kept his seat, and was no sooner over than he asked me to change horses with him, alleging that the one he was on was a new purchase and not to his taste; he wished me to try it and give an opinion on it. For nearly half an hour the sulky beast of a chestnut kept us waiting; but at last, finding there was no chance of his unsating or tiring out his rider, he took the hedge in splendid style and all three closing in together we set off for the hill. The next fence he took capitally, going in the middle between our two horses; but the one after I began to think might prove a puzzler, and felt rather anxious when we drew near it. When we were quite close to it, however, Spitfire crept forward a little, and, forgetful of all his former bad temper, took it splendidly; his rider, then keeping him in a quiet canter, continued up the hill.

"Well done!" I exclaimed as I came up. "If he goes as well in the race, he is safe to win. What do you say, Melton?"

"I think he'll go," he answered. "I don't fancy I'll have any trouble if I can make him take the first fence well; in order to do that I must accustom him to obey me; and so I think if you and Cameron would return home I will give him a little schooling about here for an hour or so; by that time I shall be able to tell you where to put your money."

Cameron, greatly pleased at Hugh's wonderful success, readily assented to this proposal, and we rode off together. I did not fancy my companion, though just now he was in one of his pleasant moods, rattling away about his private affairs, telling me for how much he was dippel, and if the state of his affairs reached the ears of his intended bride's father, there was no knowing whether, being very strait-laced in his ideas, he might not take exception at the manner in which some of the debts had been incurred. All this low, scheming selfishness was disgusting to listen to, and I could not help wondering how any girl such as Hugh had described Miss Meares to be could care for such a man. I was more and more drawn to the conclusion, the more I thought on the matter, that Hugh was risking his life for a

mere fancy of his own, as, not to charge Miss Meares with anything worse, I was sure she would not feel any deep grief at hearing of her *furor's* death, if indeed he had succeeded in killing himself in the race, which I permitted myself to doubt, for the reason that "he that's born to be," etc.—you know the rest, and will, I am sure, agree with me when you have a closer acquaintance with the individual in question.

At ten o'clock Hugh came in; it was still that soft perfumed twilight of the height of summer, and there was light enough for me to see his face, on looking at which I was not surprised to find he was fearfully tired.

"Well," he said, throwing himself into an arm-chair, "I had a dreadful scene after you left; but I fancy I have conquered him at last. If I had staid there all night I should have done so before I would let him go home without doing what I wanted; he wished to follow you back to camp. Give me a glass of beer, Charlie; I'm too done up to speak till I have restored exhausted nature."

I gave him what he asked for, and then he described to me the terrible battle, where the fighting was all on one side, through which he had passed, ending by saying:

"And now, Charlie, if you have any money to spare, put it all on him; for I think when I have given him one or two more lessons I shall be able to make him do as I like, and there is nothing that can beat him in Aldershot."

The day of the steeple chase at last came, and I, being one of the stewards, went over early, and round the course to see that everything was as it should be. We had put up some very good jumps; one good wet ditch, a stone wall that, though nothing to an Irishman, I fancy many in camp would not have liked to negotiate; one or two fences of the kind they call double ditches in the sister isle, and some flights of stout ox-palings. Altogether it was a course demanding pluck and good riding, though I saw nothing that a good horse, properly handled, could not get over safely; indeed, the committee had expressly desired that nothing of a break-neck character should be attempted. Hugh looked very well in green and silver, and doubtless many an admiring glance was cast at him by the fair denizens of the grand stand; but he never seemed to look that way, or to notice the pretty faces and brilliant toilets which it displayed. Not so Gerald Courtown, the rider of Jack Masterman; that dandy ensign in his scarlet jacket formed a conspicuous object among the throng, and might be seen improving the few minutes left before mounting in flirting from one bevy of beauties to the other, receiving with evident delight an immense amount of chaff and complimentary badinage. Then there was Powell, in black and orange, rider of The O'Donoghue, a horse that might with good riding become an awkward opponent for either of the favorites, though for some reason or other the public had not fancied him. Good riding he was sure to get at the hands of Powell of the 2d, who was heart and soul wrapped up in horsemanship, and who made it his boast he had never yet "met the woman he would care to look round at." He now stood moodily watching the horses as they were led up and down clothed from head to foot, waiting for the saddling bell to ring. Now and then he would begin an excited eulogy of his mount, The O'Donoghue, to any of his acquaintances who were unwary enough to venture near him; but we who knew him well avoided him at such times, as he was impossible to get rid of when once off on his favorite topic. Then there was Beresford of the Blues, leaning against the dash-board of a pony phaeton, in which sat Lady Blanche de Vaux, for whom it was whispered Beresford entertained more than a mere passing admiration.

It had been settled that the horses should take a preliminary canter before the grand stand, in order that the fair spectators there assembled might have a good opportunity of inspecting the different horses and choosing those whom they might wish to back, which last was decided by the rider on its back more than by the merits of

the animal itself, I fancy. At length the saddling bell rang. Beresford tore himself away from his lady-love; Gerald Courtown, with a laugh and a nod distributed generally to the assembled beauty of the stand, turned toward the paddock; Powell's gloomy face lighted up for the first time, and the usual wild gleam came into his eye; while Melton linked his arm in mine and drew me away with him toward the horses.

Spitfire was looking splendid, there was no doubt about that; and I hardly wondered at Hugh's saying, in a heart-felt tone of admiration:

"Isn't he a picture? Isn't he perfect, Charlie? Did you ever see see so magnificent an animal before?"

Nevertheless, the beauty thus apostrophized did not look amiable, though to my surprise, on Hugh's approaching him and petting him, he became considerably more quiet, and allowed the saddling process to proceed without any very violent effort to prevent it. At last all was ready; the second bell rang; the riders sprang into their seats, and set off in a quiet canter up the gentle hill past the stand. I rode quietly up a little distance behind them, watching Hugh with admiring eyes; his perfect easy seat, his lithe active figure, that moved in unison with the motion of his horse, his hand well down, restraining with light but firm touch the impetuosity of the powerful steed he rode; altogether he formed a picture of a perfect horseman, and, to my mind, out of the twelve men cantering at that moment up the green together, there was not one to be compared to him as regarded the perfection of his riding. Just as they passed the stand I saw Hugh glance quickly toward it and bow. I was surprised, as I did not know he had any lady friends near Aldershot, and I was on the point of riding up to try and find out who she was, when Templeton, the young fellow who was to have ridden Spitfire if he had not sprained his wrist at such an inconvenient time, strolled up to me in his usual languid way, holding out his uninjured hand as though it cost him a powerful effort to make such an exertion.

"Morning, Cairnsford. I say Spitfire will win; don't you think so? Splendid fellow that Melton! Always knew he could ride if he chose, though he never would take the loan of a horse from me. He's got a hand that will keep that beast's temper cool, if any one can. I watched him passing up now; not an ounce weight resting on his mouth, though the brute was mad with impatience. That's the way to ride; he'll give those fellows a lesson, I'm thinking. Good-by; see you again at luncheon, I suppose?" And so saying, the dandy horseman strolled quietly away.

I now moved up near the starting-post and watched the arrangements with anxious eyes; a few false starts would so completely rouse Spitfire's temper that I doubted if even Hugh would then succeed in getting anything out of him. The flag at length fell, and the twelve horses bounded away together: a beautiful sight they were, the riders with their gay-colored jackets, the horses with their beautifully shaped bodies glistening under the brilliant July sun, as though clothed in satin, springing over the elastic turf in rapid, regular bounds, tossing their delicate heads, and straining on the bit in impatience to be free. I was surprised to see at the first few bounds that Hugh kept behind all the rest, going quietly. I imagined he must be doing it with a view to getting a lead over the first fence, but still I could not help thinking it an error in judgment to allow the whole field in front of him, as among so many there might be one who would set the example of balking, and then it would be all up with Spitfire. Scarcely had I begun to think thus, however, and before they neared the fence, the chestnut darted to the front, and increasing his speed at every stride, went galloping at the stout paling in front. "He must be mad," I thought, alluding to Hugh; "he should never take that horse at a fence without a lead;" and mentally cursing his stupidity, I watched anxiously for

the result. To my surprise, however, just as he neared the fence, the horse slackened his racing speed into a quick steady gallop, then rose like a bird at the post and rails, and the next instant was sailing along, evidently held well in hand, to allow of the others coming up. Gerald Courtown and Jack Masterman popped over next, followed by Powell on the Irish horse The O'Donoughe; but Beresford, sad to relate, cannoned against Sims of the 28th, and came to ignominious grief before Lady Blanche's eyes. He picked himself up, however, but his horse had picked itself up first, and was now galloping wildly over the course, for some time resisting all attempts to catch it; so that when at last it was secured the race was virtually over, and quite crestfallen his gay rider returned to the stand, where, however, he found Lady Blanche very ready to heap any amount of opprobrious epithets on poor Sims's devoted head, and condole with him to his heart's content. In the meantime the riders held on their course; one by one the outsiders fell off, all but one, Solace of "ours," a small slight fellow riding a lithe active Irish mare that seemed inclined to give the favorites some trouble. She sprang over the ground like a deer, switching her rat-tail and flourishing her hind-quarters in a way that told as plainly as words that she was yet going at her ease, and thought nothing of what was before her. A very pretty sight it was, too, to see her at a fence, not striding over it like our horses, but going up all together, something like a hare, and, like that animal also, sometimes giving a half turn while in the air, and landing almost sideways to the fence she had jumped.

"That one will give them some trouble," said Templeton, who was again beside me, and who was now a little excited, for him. "See, The O'Donoghue and Firefly are side by side; watch them going at that wall; they jump so differently from the rest. Pretty, isn't it?" he added, as they went over together. Spitfire was still in the front, and Templeton's eye falling on him, he nodded approvingly. "That's a clever fellow, that Melton. How well he took the measure of that animal's temper! I'd hardly have dared myself to take him first at that first fence, and yet I see now it was the right thing to do; he's a queer, nervous, irritable temper, that gets flurried and excited when he sees the others going before him. I say, look there—Firefly is creeping up to the favorite. I didn't believe Solace when he talked so eternally of his mare Firefly, and all she could do. I'm beginning to think more of her now. What a stayer she must be! She looks as fresh as a daisy, and goes along whisking her wicked-looking tail as though it was all play to her. Melton will have some trouble with her, I think.

As Templeton finished speaking the outsider and the favorite had closed up, and were now running neck and neck; the next fence would be the last, and then there were about six hundred yards of racing ground before reaching the winning-post.

Solace's riding was greatly inferior to Melton's; there was a want of hand and too great a desire to interfere with his horse's performances that put the little Irish mare at a disadvantage; still, to the intense astonishment of everyone, she not only held her ground, but actually appeared to gain slightly on the show horse of the regiment, and indeed one might say of the army—the one of whom it had been said that it would be impossible to beat him if only he did not lose his temper. And he had not lost it; on the contrary, he was going splendidly, literally flying over the ground with his glorious, stretching stride, yet never able to shake off for an instant the wiry, lean form that with springing, bounding action kept pace with him.

Everyone in that great crowd held his breath as they reached the last fence; the pace was fearful, and the keenest judge could not have guessed which would win.

Suddenly, as they approached at a breathless pace the fence before them, a woman's long

white cloak fluttered out on the breeze from the other side of the hedge; Firefly, held negligently by her inexperienced rider, swerved wildly, while Spitfire, kept straight with a firm yet gentle hand, flew to the front, clearing the leap in splendid style, and then laying himself down, advanced with lightning speed to the winning-post. It was but a moment that Firefly swerved from the track, but in that moment Spitfire gained the opposite side; close on his heels, however, the gallant mare, set right by her excited rider, bounded over with the spring and elasticity of a roebuck, and then stretching herself for the first time, and letting for the first time her marvelous speed be seen, she flew rather than galloped after her opponent. Very small was the advantage Spitfire had gained, and with the first two boards she reached his girths; then for the first time Melton called on his noble steed, that responded gamely with every muscle exerted to the utmost. Breathless the crowd looked on, as the brown mare's head crept up to his shoulder. Was it possible? Could he hold his own to the winning-post? Two springs more would do it; but already the dark head stretched beside the chestnut's foaming neck. Another bound, another—and they shot past the winning-post, Melton the winner, by about half a head, of perhaps the closest race ever run in "ours," and certainly one that astonished the judges more than anything that had been seen for a long time at Aldershot.

The excitement was intense. So close was the race that some fancied one the winner, some the other; and it was not until the judge had formally proclaimed Spitfire's success that some even of his backers could be induced to believe in it. After a congratulatory shake of the hand to Melton, the winner was almost wholly disregarded, while every one crowded round the little brown mare that had come in such a splendid second, and that every one knew well could have won so easily if it had been ridden as the favorite had been.

"Why, Solace," said Templeton, in a rather more excited tone than his usual languid drawl, "where in the world did you pick up that animal, and how did you keep her so dark? She's a regular flyer, and no mistake; but for that shy the race was yours easily, and if you had held her well in hand you would not have lost it by that."

"I know," answered Solace, laughing good-humoredly. "I don't pretend to be a first-rate horseman like Melton; still, you know, I told you all I had got a mare that would beat the favorite even with my bad riding; and so she would if it hadn't been for a fluke. I bought her in the west of Ireland; saw her there and liked her when I was over fishing a few months ago, and have been trying to ride her ever since. She's a rough one and no mistake to ride when she's fresh."

Courtown and Powell had come in close together third and fourth; all the others were nowhere, and now came straggling in one by one, greatly disgusted, no doubt, at their position, and as much astonished as anyone else at the unforeseen termination of the race.

While we were all looking at Firefly, and talking over her splendid success, Melton stole off; and when I again came toward the grand stand, I was astonished to see him standing beside a lady, to whom he was talking with no little earnestness and animation. A glance at her face, however, enlightened me; it was the original of the portrait I had admired so much a few days ago—no less a person than Miss Meares, the great heiress, and the promised bride of Cameron, who also stood near, looking with nonchalant, unconcerned eyes on his betrothed and her companion. I looked at her somewhat critically as I approached, and must own that I was not disappointed; she was even prettier than his sketch, and though she talked with an easy, unconstrained manner and a pleasant flow of conversation, yet there seemed a mournful depth in her long violet eyes, as she lifted them now and then to his, that betrayed perhaps more than she would have liked to be observed. As to him, he

seemed to forget for the time the barrier that existed between them; the excitement of the ride had flushed his cheek, and the exhilaration of triumph lent a lustre to his eye that made him look handsomer than I had ever seen him look before; while the same causes chased away all sad remembrances, and gave him courage and inclination to rattle on in a continuous stream of merry chat and laughter, as happy and light-hearted as though no pleading words and passionate prayers had ever passed his lips to her. I could not help thinking what a contrast he must present to her eye with the face, figure, attitude, manner, the *tout ensemble*, of her future husband, as they stood there side by side, eyeing each other now and then with instinctive distrust and dislike.

Cameron was in his gayest humor; he was standing beside the acknowledged belle of the day, who was, besides, one of the richest heiresses in England, for whose smile men were willing to go through any amount of danger, and to stand beside whom with the right that Cameron possessed, would have made more than one heart there present throb with a rapture beside which all other joys would be cold and lifeless. More than all this, he had won largely; his creditors would be quieted, at least for the time, as I don't believe that gentleman ever had the least intention of liquidating his debts in full; however, he would pay as much as would render him safe, and that was all he wanted.

We were having a large luncheon party that day, and on entering the room with some lady friends, I found Mr. and Miss Meares were also among the number of the guests. They sat opposite me, so that I had a very good opportunity for observing the young lady; and the more I saw of her the more I liked her. I felt, indeed, as though the peculiar charm of manner Melton had spoken of was exercising its influence over me, and I am sure my lady friends must have found me rather more preoccupied than was pleasant or flattering. Hugh sat on one side of her, and I heard him say, in the careless manner under which he sometimes hid deep feeling, "Do you remember some very good advice you gave me the last time I saw you, Miss Meares?"

The color flushed a little over that clear, pale face of hers as she answered, "I don't remember ever giving you any good advice; but if I did I hope it has been profitable to you."

"Yes, it was just about that I wanted to tell you," he replied. "I have ever since tried to act up to it, and though in some things I think that 'le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle,' still in others it pays; for instance, you would be surprised to see how I have improved in my art. Don't you remember telling me I ought to have a fixed object in life? Well, I have chosen painting for my object, and have followed it up closely ever since. I thought you would be pleased to hear what your good advice has done for me; I hope your own practice of it has been equally successful."

Again I saw the tears rise slowly in the depths of her lovely violet eyes as she turned away pained and annoyed at his frivolous and impertinent tone; his gaze, which followed her every motion, saw it, too, and in an instant penitence followed his cruel speech. He leaned toward her and said, hurriedly and brokenly, in so low a voice that none but I overheard him, "Forgive me; I don't know what I say or do. The sight of you has brought back hopes and longings I had thought long dead in me. I would never have come near you had I thought I should have been betrayed into saying anything that could have caused you a moment's pain. My heart is sore, and I have passed to-day through the bitterest trial life can bring me. But do not fear; I will distress you no more."

She heard him, and gave him one timid, hurried, upward glance that spoke pardon, and I almost thought love, in its lingering tenderness; then turned away and busied herself with what was before her.

Hugh, after this, spoke no more to her; but I could see his gaze lingering on her every now and

then, when he thought she was engaged with Captain Cameron, who sat on the other side of her father, with a look that revealed too plainly to my anxious eyes how utterly every hope and affection of his noble and still young life, with all its abundant promise of daring deeds and painstaking triumphs of art, was bound up in this young heiress, with her sweet pure beauty, her clever radiant smile, her love-lit tender eyes, her halo of golden hair, and all the dainty adornments of modern fashion helping, in their careful, tasteful arrangement, to heighten and enhance a beauty already too dangerous without their assistance. The lady on the other side of him was fully occupied talking to her next neighbor, so that he had nothing to call away his attention from Miss Meares; and I, who knew his mind, could read so clearly the torture he was undergoing, as he watched Cameron's attentions with wild, vindictive eyes, that I almost feared those around me must see it too. But no; they were all too busy with their own affairs, and I forced myself to amuse my friends also, for fear they might perceive to whom my attention was straying. The longest day must have an end, and this one at last wound slowly to its close. Our fair guests departed to adorn themselves for the ball we gave that night to celebrate the favorite's victory; and I went off to my room, dragging Hugh with me, much against his will, he, poor fellow, no doubt wanting to go and brood in solitude over his hard fate, and perhaps deplore the softness that had led him to play into Cameron's hands in the matter of riding the horse. However, I would not take any refusal from him, and once safely inside my room I pushed him into a comfortable chair and left him for a few minutes in peace to collect himself and get over the exciting events of the day. After a few minutes I looked up from some writing I was busy with, and glancing at him, saw his brow contracted by a dark frown, and the whole expression of his face so painfully sad that I determined to try if I could console him. I therefore went quietly up to him, and laying my hand on his shoulder, said:

"Dear Hugh, what is the matter? Can I help you in any way?"

He started, and for a moment an impatient look crossed his face; but it faded away, and with his smile sweet as ever, but unmistakably sad, he answered,

"No, Cairnsford. What troubles me now is a thing that none can lighten or take away, and yet that causes more heart-burnings and miseries than any thing on this wide earth—I mean the anguish of unavailing regret, of bitter remorse. I saw you looking at me to-day at luncheon, Charlie; and no wonder; you must truly have been ashamed of your friend, when my distress, even such as I had to bear, could have made me utter a covert taunt to one so good and true as she. When I saw the pained, startled look in her sweet face, and the unshed tears glistening in her gentle eyes, then I knew that I had been a brute, and felt that I should never forgive myself; but the words had been spoken, words such as I should have uttered to no woman, least of all to her, who had acted all through this matter, not for her own happiness, but for that of her parents; and no apology, no repentance, can deface from my mind the painful surprise that looked out of her startled eyes as she turned them on me, with the mute inquiry, 'And you too, you whom I trusted, and thought would have known me better?'"

Anxious to turn his thoughts from such a painful subject, I interrupted him, saying, "At any rate, Hugh, I am convinced that if you had allowed Cameron to imperil his neck by riding that horse, she would, to say the least, not have blamed you for any accident that might have happened. I fancy the gallant captain is hardly appreciated in that quarter."

"You are mistaken, Charlie; indeed you are," he replied earnestly. "Miss Meares is not a girl to go before God with a lie on her lips; she will try to love him, if she has not already succeeded in doing so, in order that she may fulfill the conditions of the will, and there-

by provide her parents with a happy home in their old age. But if she does not love him, she will never marry him; I know her well enough to be sure that, *coute que coute*, she will abide by the right."

I saw it was useless to say more on the subject, and so drew him gradually off by a series of well-contrived questions about the race, the merits of the horses, the style of the riders, the size of the leaps, etc., though all the while I could not help wondering how it was that such a clever fellow as Hugh could have succumbed so entirely to that charming and dangerous beauty. Yet, after all, there was more reason in his infatuation than there is in most men's; it was not alone the beauty of face, form, and color, or the charm of a sweet manner and a silvery musical voice, that had enslaved him; it was something far higher and rarer than these—the spell of a noble intellect, a fervid imagination, the attraction of a kindred soul in art, a mind that could enter into and sympathize with the slightest shades and inflections of feeling in his; while above all and over all was shed the clear, unwavering light of lofty principles and unswerving loyalty to them. It was not so hard to understand after all, looking at it in this light, and I heartily wished Hugh had never seen her, rather than that he should have been allured into a passion which, taking his nature and her character into consideration, I have every reason to believe he would never conquer. However, for the time being I contrived to divert him from his troubles, but was not surprised when he announced his intention of not going to the ball that evening. I thought he was right, as seeing her again would only pain him afresh; so bidding him good-night, I hurried off to the ball-room, where, as one of the committee, I was obliged to put in an early appearance.

CHAPTER III.

A THIEF IN THE DARK.

"Such an extraordinary thing has happened to me," said Captain James at mess a few weeks after the race, "Tell me, did any of you fellows see any one going into or out of my room yesterday while I was out?" He addressed the table generally, and looked ruffled and annoyed as he spoke; a most unusual thing with that laziest and most good-tempered of men.

We all looked up, and Melton, from the other end of the table, called out, "I was in your room for a minute or two yesterday afternoon, to fetch a book you told me I would find there. Why, what's up?"

"Oh, it wasn't you I meant; but any of the servants, or people of that kind? You remember my telling you the day before yesterday of the curious letter I had received from that fellow Griffin, who had absconded and let me in for a bill I had backed for him, inclosing me bank-notes to the value of the £500 for which I had been let in. Well, I intended to have lodged that at Cox's yesterday; but not being able to resist the temptation of a day's shooting unexpectedly offered, I went out, leaving it on my desk. To-day, when I went to look for it, it was gone clear and clean, leaving me without any clew by which I can trace it, as I had forgotten to take the number of the notes."

"By Jove, that is too bad! It must be looked into," growled Major Porter through his bristly red mustache, and coloring up at the bare thought that such a thing should have happened in his regiment, while everyone's face round the table expressed in various degrees more or less concern.

"Did you see any signs of the room having been disturbed, or did it look just as usual when you went in?" asked James, after a pause, of Melton.

Hugh smiled, as did many others round the table; for it was well known that James, besides being the most indolent man in the regiment, was very probably, in right of that attribute, also the most disorderly, his room always presenting an appearance that conveyed to one's mind the

idea of a Bedlamite's paradise. A boot in one corner, a sword in another, a regimental coat lying here, a pair of trousers there, pipes strewn the floor as though sown broadcast over it, the above-mentioned desk lying open topsy-turvy under the table, its contents fluttering playfully about the room as the summer breeze floated in through the open window—these were a few of the most ordinary appearances of the chamber; so that it was no wonder Hugh smiled as he answered, "I did not observe anything unusual in the appearance of the room, but"—Here he stopped and hesitated for a moment.

"But what?" asked James.

"But that might be," continued Hugh, still with a slight shade of embarrassment, "because what would be unusual in other rooms would not be unusual there."

This remark was greeted with a general suppressed smile, and was thought to be a hit at the captain; but notwithstanding that, a certain uneasiness in Hugh's manner might have led one to think that his mind was occupied with more important matters than his friend's disorderly habits.

James, however, whether it was meant as a hit or not, took it with his usual good humor, saying, "Ah, true, I dare say my room is not quite as dandified as those of you other fellows; but, now, what do you advise me to do about my money?"

Every one was eager offering advice, some urging one plan, some another; not that any of their plans seemed likely to tend to the ultimate object of securing the thief, but at least it made the speaker be listened to with a certain amount of attention while enunciating his opinion, and afterward—why, it was another's turn to speak, and he was forgotten. However, after nearly an hour's excited talk, it was found we were no nearer hitting on a plan for the recovery of the money or the discovery of the robber, as we were all strongly against bringing in a detective from Scotland Yard on account of the scandal it would give rise to; and it was determined only that each one among us should keep a watch on all articles of value in our possession, with the idea that if there was any thief among the servants, one such successful haul would not satisfy him, and he would soon be at it again.

Days passed away, but nothing transpired that could in any way give a clew to this most disagreeable business; and then days passed into weeks, but still everything remained in just as unsatisfactory a state as at first. At last one day, about two weeks after the event, as I was sitting looking at the papers in the news-room, I heard several young fellows using Hugh's name in a way I didn't quite like, though at first I hardly caught what they meant. I stopped reading, and listened.

"At any rate, you'll admit," said young Tuf-ton, a newly joined ensign of the most cabbish appearance—"at any rate, you'll admit it was odd, Melton's being in the room that afternoon."

"It would have been still more odd," said I, rising, while I restrained with a violent effort my inclination to take the young snob by the neck and pitch him out of the room—"it would have been still more odd had he been in the room and had not mentioned it. And now once for all, gentlemen, whoever dares to breathe a word of the kind you have just been uttering before me must recollect that I shall consider all such speeches as direct insults to myself, and shall take measures accordingly."

"No, Cairnsford, this is my affair," said a grave voice behind me, while a hand was laid on my shoulder. "I heard what these gentlemen were saying as I came into the room, and I warn them that any remarks reflecting on my honor will require to be vindicated and upheld in a way they may not wish."

"You forget," said Tuf-ton, with a sneer, "that to people suspected of appropriating what does not belong to them it is not considered necessary to offer satisfaction. Indeed, as gentlemen we couldn't do it."

I was looking at Hugh, and saw the blood mount in a hot flush over his face, and a steel-blue light gleam in his dark eyes, as with a

bound like a panther he sprang forward, and before the imprudent youth could stir, he was held fast by the collar in Hugh's muscular grasp. Melton carried in his hand a strong cutting whip (he had just come in from riding Spitfire), and raising it, while the frightened youth vainly struggled to get free, he appeared about to administer a correction which, however severe, the cub had certainly merited. I was, however, for his own sake about to interfere, and beg him not to yield to an impulse of passion, when, dropping his whip, Melton flung the struggling sub violently from him, saying:

"You are not worth it; the lesson would be lost on such as you. Stay," he added, in a commanding voice, as thoroughly crestfallen Tuf-ton was trying to sneak out of room, "let me hear who put this honorable idea into your head, for I don't believe your brains would ever have invented it without assistance."

"Ah," said the cub, brightening up, as he thought of bringing more influential names than his own into the same scrape, "I heard Captain Cameron saying he thought it odd, and that he wondered Captain James had not inquired more particularly of you at what time you had been there, how long you had staid, where you got the book, and all the rest of it; and Leyton, with whom he was talking, said such an idea would never have entered into his head, but that now it was talked of it certainly did appear suspicious."

"So, then, Cameron is the gentleman to whom I am indebted for these insinuations," said Hugh, slowly, with a puzzled look on his indignant face that gradually assumed a more determined and convinced expression, while even his very lips grew white, and the veins in his forehead swelled with some hidden emotion. "You may go," he continued, turning to Tuf-ton, "and remember, though you may think yourself above giving me satisfaction, I can get it out of you in such fashion as may make you wish you had been a little less particular."

Tuf-ton slunk off, looking very much like a whipped hound, and then Melton, turning to the rest of us, said:

"Now, gentlemen, after all that has passed, it is necessary that I should see Cameron, and find out what foundation that puppy had for mixing my name up in this affair. There is no doubt he will be willing to give such an explanation as will satisfy me, and explain his meaning to have been void of offense." So saying, he walked quickly out of the room, and we saw him take the way to Cameron's quarters. What occurred there I did not hear for many a long month after; but as this seems the proper place for it, I shall relate what happened, just as Hugh afterward told me.

When he entered Cameron's room that gentleman was looking over some papers, but on seeing who his visitor was, he shuffled them quickly out of sight and looked up impatiently.

"Cameron," began Hugh, "that young snob Tuf-ton has been making some very offensive insinuations about me, and he gives you out as the person from whom he heard them. He said just now in the reading-room, before Cairnsford and others, that you had said it was a suspicious circumstance my being the only person in James's room the day those notes were stolen. I was very near giving the young fellow the hiding he richly deserved, and I promised the others you would explain your words to have been either entirely altered or their meaning taken up in a way you did not intend."

"And why shouldn't I intend it?" answered Cameron, impudently. "I do think it a suspicious circumstance; and if you're innocent, by Jove, you're awfully unlucky, for no one would believe it."

Hugh stepped forward and seized him by the arm, turning his face as he did so full to the light; it was an accidental movement, but for all that it helped the denouement of the scene.

"You can't think that," he said, sternly; "you

know me too well to credit such an accusation, even if you dared make it."

Here he stopped, for a sudden, and to Mel-ton's upright heart an awful change came over the face turned full to his; it was a look of guilt and terror and abject cowardice, that brought at once conviction to the beholder's mind. Mel-ton drew away his hand from Cameron's arm with a kind of loathing wonder depicted on his expressive face.

"You were the thief," he exclaimed. "You! Oh, I had not thought of anything so bad as this; it is too terrible!" and he turned away, partly that he might not see the cringing, terror-stricken being before him, partly that he might have time to collect his thoughts and decide on a course of action.

"Oh," cried Cameron, mistaking his movement, and fearing he was about to go off and proclaim his discovery, "for the love of Heaven don't tell! I was in sore need; all the money I had won did not quite pay my debts, and there was one man to whom I owed £400 who would have arrested me in a day or two more, and then, though my marriage would perhaps hardly have been broken off, it would have caused a scandal that would have pained Maud; and indeed her father might have taken any measures, I could not bear it, and knowing where this money was, I was unable to resist the temptation, and took it. He could well spare it, and I intended to pay it back on my marriage; indeed I did," he added, with vehement assertion, seeing, no doubt, in Hugh's face that he did not believe that last statement.

"My duty is only too clear," answered Hugh; "I must tell James what I know. I could never have believed it, Cameron, and am indeed sorry for you; but I must do what I feel to be right."

"Yes, and be asked for your proofs," sneered Cameron, who, driven to desperation, now determined to put a bold face on it and brazen the matter out. "I think you forget all about them, but they are very necessary, I can assure you. My word is as good as yours, and I have taken good care you should be under suspicion already. Anything you may say of me will only confirm the rumors afloat about yourself, as everyone will think you accuse me to try and divert attention from your own proceedings."

It was too true, and for a moment Hugh was almost overwhelmed by the desperate situation in which he found himself. He had too great command over himself, however, to show how deeply his enemy's arrows had penetrated, and after a moment's silence, during which time he reflected that he must dare all or lose all, he resolved from his knowledge of Cameron's antecedents to draw a bow at a venture, and see what success would follow his audacity.

"Proofs!" he repeated, with a light, confident laugh that had a touch of cynicism in its tone. "I haven't got them now, but I can have them before nightfall. It will only be necessary to frighten your friend Mr. Solomons into letting us look among his entries for your last payment. The amount was £400, I think, and the time about ten days ago"—He would have gone on, but Cameron interrupted him.

"Are you the devil in person, or have you been reading my papers, Melton?" he asked. "Curse you! What do you mean by meddling in my affairs?"

"You seem to forget," answered Hugh, quietly, satisfied that he had got the clew to this affair, "that you began the matter by interfering with my honor and good name. In my attempt to vindicate these, I have discovered what is to me an indescribably painful secret, which, however, can now be a secret no longer, as I feel it to be my duty to acquaint James at once with all I have found out."

"Melton, for heaven's sake have a little pity!" wildly entreated Cameron. "Consider the shame and sorrow you will cause my intended bride; for her sake, if you are a man, spare me. I swear solemnly never to commit such an action again, and to restore the money

with interest as soon as I can get such a sum together."

At the mention of Cameron's intended bride Hugh's face paled, and his lips quivered with an emotion he could not repress as he thought of her whom he loved united to such a reptile as this before him.

Cameron saw the change in his countenance, and quick as light divining its cause, saw in it a ray of hope, while it aroused in him a bitter hatred of the man who loved his beautiful betrothed, and to whom, his heart told him, she was not perhaps as indifferent as she might be.

Following up this ray of hope, he continued driving in the wedge deeper where he saw the point had penetrated. "Think," he said, "of Maud. I admit I am most unworthy of her, but she does not know it; she believes me to be all she would wish me to be, and it would break her heart could she see to what depths I have fallen in my struggle to clear away those debts that raised impediments to our union. Think of her, so tenderly loved, so carefully reared, so noble and so upright in all her feelings, withering slowly away under the disgrace, or dying of the shock, of finding out that the man she loved was branded with the stigma of theft."

As Cameron, in hurried, breathless words, drew this picture of Maud Meares's affection for him and her anguish at his shame, Hugh turned away with a half-uttered sob that was heard only too distinctly by the man beside him, who mentally registered a vow that, when his opportunity occurred, he would make the fellow pay well for his audacity in daring to love his (Cameron's) betrothed. For this time, however, his eloquence prevailed; for after a pause Hugh turned slowly, and facing him, said, "I could despise myself for being in any way partner in your guilt, and in not telling what I know I am in a way partner in it. But because you have prayed me by a power I cannot resist, I spare you this once, on condition that you shall not marry Miss Meares before the expiration of two years; and if before that time has elapsed I hear of any other such acts on your part, I shall proclaim all I know, which will have the effect of at once putting an end to your engagement; for however well Miss Meares may love you, one of her principles would never consent to marry a man accused of such a crime as yours. In the meantime, I shall procure the money and send it anonymously to Captain James, you giving me your note of hand for the sum, to be paid before this time next year; also, I must insist on your explaining publicly at mess those words relative to myself, overheard by young Tuf-ton, which have been going the round of the camp greatly to my prejudice. You will easily find some plausible way for giving them an innocent meaning. Give me your acknowledgment for £500. That will do; James shall have it to-morrow. Remember our conditions."

Then, without deigning to bestow a glance on his crestfallen companion, Hugh left the room, and presently rejoined me, saying all was right; notwithstanding which assertion, his grave, sad looks raised a doubt in my mind that all was as right as he said.

That day at mess, Cameron, whose face bore no evidence of the crisis he had just passed through, said, carelessly, "By the way, Tuf-ton, you must have strangely misconceived a remark you heard me make the other day, or else you cannot have heard it properly. I said I considered it strange that Captain Melton, having been some little time in the room looking for a book, should neither have disturbed the thief nor seen any appearance of the desk having been tampered with, and I certainly wonder Captain James had not questioned him more closely as to the aspect of the room, and the time at which he went there, with a view to finding out what people were likely to be about at that particular hour. It seems you have been drawing disagreeable conclusions from those very harmless and natural remarks. I trust you will not do so in future, and I hope Melton will accept

my apology for having unintentionally given rise to slanderous reports."

Melton muttered something about "Certainly," and "Pray say no more about it;" but his face was grave and annoyed; while Tufton looked wretchedly sat upon, and didn't seem to know whether to leave the room or remain where he was.

So that matter was, or ought to have been, settled; but as we all know, it is far easier to set bad reports going than to stop them once they get afloat; and more than once I perceived after this some of the younger fellows, who had not yet learned to know and esteem Melton's character, and others who, though older and knowing better, yet hated him because his pure and noble life shamed theirs, whispering together in a mysterious manner, always stopping suddenly when either Hugh or I approached them; a precaution which was certainly wise, as I doubt whether either of us would have heard their discourse with patience.

The golden autumn days flew by quickly. I had one or two good days among the stubble and turnips, while Hugh worked away with unremitting vigor at his beloved art; it was his companion and friend, his solace in trouble, his inspiration in joy. Always busy, his fingers never seemed to flag, his mind never to weary of it; and I often envied the marvelous power of forgetting his griefs in a fairy-land of his own creation that he seemed to possess. And yet not forgetting; I am wrong in using that expression. Properly speaking, he did not forget his griefs; he bore them with a calm fortitude that rose more from deep strong feeling well controlled than from any other cause, and he would set himself to work in order that constant occupation might prevent his mind from dwelling on its troubles, and eating itself away in useless repining.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CROQUET PARTY.

It was during that short golden summer we generally have in the beginning of October—when the leaves don their gayest colors, crimson and bronze, scarlet and glowing yellow, when the hills are hazy in the distance, and a bluish vapor hangs over moor and upland—that Hugh, I, and several of the others, Cameron among the number, were invited to the last croquet party of the season at lady A——'s charming place, six miles out of Aldershot on the London road.

We were asked at three o'clock to play croquet until five o'clock tea, after which those who liked might play again, or stroll in the grounds until six o'clock, when we were to dine, and end the evening by dancing. Hugh was not able to go early with me, but he promised to follow in time for the dance; so Cameron, I and one or two others went before, to assist at the croquet and get as much fun out of the day as circumstances permitted, it being generally feared, among us that before long we should be ordered out to India, and have to bid a long farewell to the pleasures and pastimes of "merrie England."

The croquet went off in much the usual way; a great amount of flirtation, leavened by the smallest possible modicum of croquet. By-the-way, if there is anything I detest, it is that habit of pretending to do one thing, while all the time you are doing another, and would not for the world give an iota of attention to the object on which you are supposed to be engaged.

Why not call an entertainment like the one in question a flirtation party? It would be a great deal more true than its present name, and would at least afford people the satisfaction of knowing what they were going for. Now if a real lover of croquet goes for croquet's sake, he finds nothing is farther from the thoughts of most of the company than attending to their game; and if he goes for the other thing, it is an awful bore to be interrupted in the midst of his most flattering speech by, "It's the red ball

to play now," or, "Come now, C——, it's your turn."

At five o'clock we went in to tea, in the little room that overlooks the croquet ground, and which you enter thence by the window. The evening was lovely; the air balmy as in June; the blue shadows settling down so peacefully on the surrounding landscape, the purple and gold clouds of sunset casting their burnished light on wood and hill in such changeful and gorgeous beauty that I could not tear myself from the scene, and remained outside leaning against the open window listening to the *bavardage* inside, and feasting my eyes in a kind of delicious lazy dream. I was standing sideways, so that I could, by a very slight movement of the head, either see into the room or gaze at will over the wide expanse of country spread out before me. Suddenly I heard a voice I knew and disliked (it belonged to a young lady of the neighborhood, fast, and a good croquet player, with whom it was rumored Solace was desperately smitten) exclaim:

"Isn't there a Captain Melton in your regiment, Captain Cameron? The man there are all those curious stories about, I mean?"

"There is a Captain Melton," he answered; but to what stories do you refer, Miss Bruce?"

"Oh, you know very well," she replied, "though I suppose you who are in the same regiment don't like repeating them. I mean those stories about some money he took, or at least is so strongly suspected of having taken, out of Captain James's room. They say the money has been returned since, and I dare say that is true, for when he found himself suspected, he was no doubt afraid to keep it."

I remained stupefied, unable to utter a word for a minute, so great was my astonishment. First at such a rumor being for a minute believed and repeated, and secondly, at its having attained such notoriety. Before, however, Cameron could answer, or I could interpose, a clear musical voice from the other end of the room said, distinctly:

"It is false; the vilest fabrication ever invented by slanderous tongues. None but those who envy Captain Melton his good reputation would have dared to coin so base a calumny."

I turned whence the voice proceeded, and there, with her head erect, her dark eyes flashing, and her whole face flushed with generous and indignant feeling, sat Miss Meares. I had not observed her on the croquet ground, and yet she must have been out, as a lace shawl was drawn across her shoulder, and a dainty hat, that seemed composed almost of white curling feathers, lay beside her on the sofa.

Cameron's face was not pleasant to look at as he glanced at his betrothed; but before he could speak Miss Bruce said, with the nearest approach to a sneer she could venture on when addressing a lady of so much importance as Miss Meares:

"Dear me, how very fortunate Captain Melton is in having such an advocate! But those things are said of him nevertheless."

"Miss Meares is right," interrupted Cameron; "Hugh Melton is a very good sort of fellow, and I am sure he has done nothing wrong, though it is true those curious stories are afloat. I wonder greatly what gave rise to them; it must have been some trifling indiscretion on his part."

"Pardon me," said I, here stepping into the room (he hadn't noticed me before, as his back was toward the window, and it was good to see his face when he found I had been listening to his vindication of his absent comrade—a vindication carefully calculated to deepen in the minds of his hearers the impression that something was wrong, and that Captain Cameron was a very good fellow to take up the cudgels for him at all)—"pardon me, but you ought not to wonder how these reports arose, as you are perfectly well aware that it was through some foolish remarks of yours, for which you were obliged to apologize publicly as soon as you were known to be the author of them."

"Ah, yes," I remember that," he stammered, greatly confused. "But I don't think all these

rumors arose from that." Here he stopped and basied himself in handing tea, looking all the time dreadfully small.

As for me, arming myself with a cup of tea, I marched straight up to Miss Meares and presented it to her. While she was drinking it I could not resist showing my appreciation of her gallant defense of Hugh, and said:

"The absent have a true friend in you, Miss Meares, and you were right in every word you said, for a more upright and noble fellow than Melton does not exist."

She glanced up brightly. "I am so glad you agree with me; I cannot tell you how indignant I felt at hearing such vile aspersions of his good name, made by those who neither know him nor are capable of comprehending or appreciating him did they know him. Are you a friend of his?"

"I am proud to think that I am one of his most intimate friends," I answered. "Ever since he joined we have kept together, and every day only increases my liking for him."

"Ah, then you must be Captain Cairnsford, of whom I have heard him speak. I am very glad to make your acquaintance. Captain Melton had talked so much about you I had quite a curiosity to see you."

As she said this she glanced at me somewhat critically, so much so that I felt inclined to ask her if she approved of his choice of a friend when I saw Hugh enter the room, having just driven over; and thinking it better he should not become immediately taken up by Miss Meares's presence, I went over to where he was talking to our hostess, and persuaded him to come out for a stroll through the grounds, which were very prettily laid out, and looked most inviting that mild October evening. We strolled about for some time, I smoking, Hugh rhapsodizing over the beauties of the gorgeous autumnal landscape, with its brilliant tints and hazy distance, till at length, finding a most inviting moss-covered seat near the house, and commanding a beautiful view, though itself hidden from observation, we sat down for a few minutes before returning to dine and begin the business of the evening—flirtation and dancing.

Suddenly we heard voices talking, which I immediately recognized as those of Miss Meares and Captain Cameron. My companion knew them also, as I saw from the contraction of his brow and quivering of his firmly compressed lips. They were passing along a path at the foot of the hill, on the top of which we were seated; but as we were under the shadow of the trees, and the evening was already darkening, they did not see us. Their voices rang out distinctly on the evening air, so that we could not help hearing every word they were saying. We would have beaten a retreat, but that was not possible without confronting them, which neither Hugh nor I wished to do. The best thing under the circumstances seemed to be sitting still, as they would soon pass out of ear-shot. She was saying: "Why did you not speak out more boldly for your comrade, Captain Melton, to-day? Only that I believe you honorable and upright as the day, I should have thought you did not wish to clear him from the imputation, your vindication was so feeble. I know well it was surprise at the charge, and not any unworthy motive; but tell me, what did Captain Cairnsford mean by saying that some foolish remarks of yours had given rise to the reports?"

I should think Cameron's face must have been a study for a physiognomist at this question. However, he answered in his most silky tones:

"Cairnsford alluded to my having said I wondered Captain Jones had not questioned Melton as to the hour at which he was in his room, and so on, with a view to finding out who were likely to be about at that particular time. I was overheard saying this, which was surely innocent enough, by Tufton, a young snob lately joined, who chose to build a whole host of slanderous rumors on it, and set them floating about the camp; but I was not to blame for it."

"Of course not," she answered; "I am so

CHAPTER V.

OUT TO INDIA.

glad you have been able to explain that, for I may now confess I had a kind of uneasy feeling from your manner. I don't think I doubted you, and yet I feared if, after all, you might not be such a man as I fancied you; for you know well my determination never to marry one in whose truth and honor I have not the most implicit confidence."

As she said this Melton seized my arm, and said, hoarsely:

"Come away; I cannot hear any more, or I shall think myself a villain for not telling her at once what I know about this man, and I cannot, for I am bound by a promise."

He dragged me away after him, taking the direction that led from the house, so that after about ten minutes' hurried stumbling through the tangled shrubbery and long damp grass we arrived at the demesne wall, on the outside of which ran the high-road. Here he stopped and turned toward me, his face pale with contending passions and quivering with emotion, still visible in the now deepening twilight, as he said:

"I can't go back to that house to-night, Charlie; make my excuses to Lady A—." Then, seeing I was about to urge him, he added: "Don't ask me. I cannot look in that innocent face and think that I am concealing from her what so nearly affects her happiness. I can't tell you either, or I would ask your advice. I am cut off from all help, and must let matters take their course. It is very hard, but my own folly has caused it all."

He laughed bitterly as he spoke, and vaulting over the wall, was gone in a moment. I remained for a few minutes rooted to the spot, musing deeply. At such times as this, when his self-restraint for a moment gave way, I could guess how intense were his sufferings at witnessing the happiness of his successful rival. Slowly I returned to the house, thinking over this most unfortunate business, and mentally stigmatizing the young lady as a mercenary coquette, and the whole of them together as a set of impracticable fools.

I made Hugh's excuses to Lady A—, and then joined the laughing, talking groups assembled, waiting for dinner to be announced; but all my former appreciation of Miss Meares had vanished, and I scrupulously avoided entering into conversation with her. After dinner the dancing began. I watched her without appearing to do so, and saw that she appeared absent and *distracted*, though she continued dancing with considerable energy with Cameron and others.

I don't care much for dancing, though when I find myself in a ball-room I generally go at it with a will, and do my duty in that line, as England, represented by her numerous spinsterhood, expects; still I confess that now and then, when you meet with an unexceptionally good partner and are moving to the music of a first-rate band, there is real enjoyment in it, and in spite of my newly conceived aversion to the beautiful heiress, I could not help thinking the Blue Danube Waltz with her for a partner would be pleasant. What an amount of nonsense the most sensible man talks at a ball, and what an appalling number of flirtations the most stony-hearted individual plunges into to the music of a swinging waltz, or under the still more potent influence of Champagne and lobster salad!

I fancy I did as much in that line as any body else that night, though I don't now remember very clearly who most attracted my attention; but I do know that I left Lady A—'s at five o'clock A.M. with a very distinct idea that it was the pleasantest ball I had ever been at, and that if all my partners resembled Miss M. Rogers, I should not find dancing such a bore as I sometimes did. Anything so delightful as that ball must of necessity be followed up by unmitigated disagreeables; so that, though intensely disgusted, I was hardly surprised, when I made my appearance at three o'clock P.M. that day, to hear we had received the route for India, and were to embark in a day or two on board H.M.S. *Echo* at Gravesend.

Now all was bustle and confusion, rushing here and there to say farewell, distracting one's brains to frame adieux that, while sufficiently sorrowful, should not be enough so to excite suspicion of more tender sentiments than it was prudent to avow. I had a good many acquaintances about, and was so taken up by paying farewell visits and receiving farewell invitations that I saw little or nothing of Hugh until the day when we found ourselves all on board the *Echo*. I might have obtained leave, and followed the regiment out by the Overland Route if I had chosen to do so; however, I had preferred keeping along with the rest, especially as Hugh could not have remained behind with me.

Our quarters were tolerably comfortable; and I have no doubt the voyage would have been a pleasant one if only Cameron had been moved by some good spirit to stay behind and follow us overland. I had heard him talking of it before we left, but for some reason he had altered his mind; and there he was, with his sneaking, self-complacent smile and his creeping, insidious ways. Percy Langham, Templeton, and one or two others of the nicest set were not with us; they would come out afterward. But their absence contributed greatly, no doubt, to the disagreeable nature of the voyage. We had been only four or five days at sea, and going well before the wind as we were, Hugh and I found it not unpleasant. Those who had been seasick were recovering, and beginning to crawl about, reminding one of sickly caterpillars, with their feeble gait and enormous appetites.

Hugh and I were standing leaning over the taffrail in the stern—I smoking, Hugh gazing idly over the blue expanse of water, sparkling under the crisp clear sunlight of an autumnal morning, and ruffled by a gentle breeze into innumerable foam-tipped wavelets—when, turning suddenly towards me with a kind of half-resentful, half-appealing look, he said:

"Charlie, have you noticed anything odd in the manner of our fellows toward me lately?"

I turned with a surprised negative on my lips, when, as I did so, I saw at a little distance Cameron talking to Brabazon, a nice young fellow, not long joined, to whom both Hugh and I had taken rather a fancy. They were both looking at us, but perceiving that I was watching them, they turned away with a kind of confused manner, and walked off. I then remembered that for the last day or two Brabazon never seemed to have time to come and chat with us in the stern as he used at first; and whenever we had tried to stop him for a minute, he had hurried away, saying, "Excuse me, I am busy." My answer, therefore, died away on my lips; for I began to feel that perhaps it might be as Hugh had suggested, though I had not yet remarked anything. He continued:

"I see, your silence tells me that you have noticed it. I am convinced Cameron is at the bottom of it. Wait and watch; you will see I am right; and if I am, I will tell you something I have hitherto kept concealed, greatly against my will, for I much wanted your counsel. A promise kept me silent, however; but I shall consider myself absolved from it—at least with regard to you—if what I suspect be the case."

We said no more then; but I was surprised at Hugh's mentioning a secret, as I thought we knew everything about each other; and also I was annoyed to think it possible that any one could presume to avoid him, or treat him as an unfit companion for the best among us.

I had not long to wait for confirmation of the suspicions Hugh had put into my head. That afternoon, as we sat in a snug little nook we had discovered among some coils of rope and bundles of sails, Brabazon and Solace came into our retreat, as though intending to sit there and smoke like ourselves.

"Ah, you have found out our hiding-place!" I exclaimed. "Isn't it jolly? There's room for you two. Come and have a chat with us."

"Oh, no; I don't think we can stay," answered Brabazon, hurriedly, looking at Hugh

askance, and seeming nervously anxious to draw Solace away with him.

Hugh looked at him calmly for a minute or two without speaking, and then raising himself slowly, but with determination expressed in every movement, from the reclining position he occupied, he said:

"You don't wish to be contaminated by my society. Isn't that it, Brabazon?"

The lad looked badly scared, and only stammered, "I—I—don't know what you mean, Captain Melton."

"Come, speak the truth like a man," he answered, sternly. "Don't be afraid. I shall keep all my wrath for those who have filled your mind with evil thoughts of me. You must tell me," he continued, springing to his feet, and placing himself in front of the young fellow, who would gladly have escaped had he been able.

"Never mind, Brabazon," interposed Solace at this juncture. "Tell Melton everything; it will give him a chance of contradicting those vile stories which he has never before had, as he has never heard them clearly yet. As for me, I don't believe them, and so I told you when you repeated them to me."

Thus encouraged, Brabazon, still greatly terrified, began:

"Cameron says he saw you enter Captain James's room, and, passing the door without a thought of anything wrong, saw you opening the desk, which lay on a table near the center of the room. He thought nothing of it at the time; but when he heard of the loss of the money, imagine his feelings. He says, Captain Melton, he was so taken aback by your effrontery in saying out boldly at mess, that you had been in the room, that at first he thought you must have been innocent; but after that affair with Tufton he became uneasy, charged you with the theft to your face, forced you to acknowledge it, and then, he says, his first wrong step was taken. Instead of going on the spot to James or the colonel, and telling what he had discovered, he allowed himself to be persuaded into keeping the matter secret. Your penitence, he said, seemed so great and your grief so abject, that he really had not the heart to ruin your prospects in life without giving you one more chance. Now," continued Brabazon, who, though a nice young fellow if he had not fallen into bad hands, had evidently been so well primed and schooled by Cameron, that he could hardly look at the matter from any point of view not sanctioned by that worthy, "I should never have fancied Cameron to be good-natured enough to do that kind of thing; and I must say in this matter I think he was altogether too lenient."

"Well, all I can say," answered Solace, "is, that his good nature does not seem to be very great when he cannot hold his tongue, but allows insinuations and rumors of all kinds to be bruited about in a way that would destroy any man's character, no matter how innocent he might be of the charges brought against him, and that as the case stands, will very likely drive Melton out of the regiment quite as surely as if he had told the colonel at first. I don't call that good nature if you do."

"I thought as you do at first," replied Brabazon; "but he explained that nothing would have induced him to betray the secret once he had allowed you, Melton, to remain in the regiment; but that when he saw me drifting into a friendship with you, taken by your charming manner and frank face, he then considered it his duty to warn me of the character of the man I was disposed to admire. Even then he did not speak out explicitly, only hinted darkly all was not right, till, seeing at last that his innuendo produced rather a contrary effect from what he wished, he was obliged to be more distinct. Besides, he said that though fear had kept you from falling into a flagrant offense since then, still he saw by your manner that, far from being repentant, you felt nothing but hatred for the man who had spared you. He says he now sees it would have been better such a character should have left the regiment at once rather than remain in it to have the opportunity of influencing young fellows recently

joined in a manner which can do them nothing but harm. Remember, Captain Melton," Brabazon went on, apologetically, "I am only repeating Cameron's exact words, and am very sorry to pain you by doing so; only you would insist on hearing them, and he never gave me to understand I was not to repeat them."

"Judging by physiognomy," interrupted Solace, "Cameron looks much more likely to commit a theft than Melton. Yet I can not fancy such a knowing fellow would have committed himself by spreading scandals unless he knew that you, Melton, were bound in some way or by some promise that would prevent your vindicating your character in the eyes of the world. However, I am glad now you have heard it all, and I for one will believe your simple denial in preference to Cameron's sneaking lies."

"Thanks, Solace," said Hugh, looking up dejectedly, but still proudly, into the young fellow's face. "I think you know me well enough to judge the measure of faith you can attach to such slanders. Circumstances prevent my disproving them as I might do; my denial is all I can give you. To you I am sure it will be all that is necessary; to others I feel it will not be as worthy of belief as Cameron's aspersions."

"It is enough for me," said Solace, a nice young fellow whom we both liked; "and I am glad to have your word, though I would have believed you without that. It is a pity you won't disprove them though; for you know a great many people will try and catch hold of your silence to make the matter worse. Think it over, and see if you can show up his falsehoods. And now, Brabazon, that you have told all about it, and are, I hope, as satisfied as I am, we will go and take a turn on the quarter-deck."

As their footsteps died away in the distance, and silence fell around us—for there was no one now any where near—I glanced at Hugh to see how he took this fresh evidence of his enemy's untiring, un pitying hate.

His face was buried in his hands, but his hurried breathing showed how keenly he felt the shame of such a charge. I pitied him for his misplaced trust, and though I never doubted his truth, I could see that Cameron had some hold over him that might avail to work his destruction. It was too true what Solace had said: though one or two might and would believe his word, by far the greater number would only exult in his downfall, and point to his silence—springing, I was sure, from some noble cause—as the proof that the accusations of his enemy were true, and he had nothing to answer against them. I waited for a few minutes, and was then about to try some effort at consolation, though hardly knowing what to say, when he looked up, turning his frank, modest eyes on me as he said, "Why, Cairnsford, are you still here?"

I knew well what he meant, and why he had not used the familiar name of Charlie, by which he had so long called him. I saw that the iron had entered into his soul; though why he should care about a stigma I felt confident he could remove I could not imagine. Still he did care; he was cut to the heart, and even one who liked him less than I might have seen that his tone and words seemed to say, "You hear of what I am accused, and see that I make no defense; why have you not left me?"

It was time something should be done to show him that some at least remained faithful, and would not believe the slanders of the enemy; so laying my hand on his arm, I said, gently:

"Hugh, I shall be really angry if you can think me so false a friend, so unworthy a mind, as to turn from the one most dear to me on the strength of a scandal spread by a man whom, of all others, I distrust and despise. You have told me you have some secret connected with him in your keeping. What it may be I know not; but I feel confident that it is to revenge himself for your having become acquainted with his secret he has invented this report, in the hope that though few would venture to disbelieve your denial, yet such a taint of suspicion would linger round you as might compel you to sell out in order to escape its atmosphere."

I see his plan, and a cunningly devised one it is; but if you consider yourself sufficiently absolved from your promise by his conduct, tell me the mystery, and we will together devise some plan to make his villainy recoil on his own head."

"Dear friend," answered Hugh, grasping my hand, "I can never thank you enough for standing by me in this cruel trial. Let me think one minute before I tell you all."

He rose and paced hurriedly up and down our narrow strip of deck. The flush had died away now from his brow, and his face looked white and worn; his lips were set in a rigid line of fierce determination; his dark eyes were painfully sad, and had a wild, hunted look in them as he glanced once or twice over the blue waters, heaving as he did so a short sigh. At length he stopped, and said, in a low voice, "I can't help it, Charlie; those who think badly of me must do so. What that young fellow said just now about Cameron reminds me of what I ought to do. A promise must be kept at all risks. He knows he is safe, or he would never have dared say such things of me. Do you remember the words of the old poem I showed you once?"

"Let me be false in other's eyes,
So faithful in mine own."

That is just my case; until he commits some more flagrant offense than inventing slanders about me, my lips are sealed. I see now I made a great mistake, and one that I fear will affect other lives dearer to me than mine; but the die is cast—I must stand by and bide my time in patience."

His voice shook as he turned away and again paced up and down, a deeper gloom than I had ever before seen there settling down on his once gay and careless face. Then he wheeled round suddenly; a light of determination breaking out over his countenance seemed to transform it into the likeness of one of those warrior angels of whom Raphael and Michael Angelo dreamed, as, facing me, he said: "I tell you, whatever he thinks to do—and you say he intends to drive me out of the regiment—I will not go. He may persecute me by slanderous reports and malicious acts, he may blacken my character and darken my life, he may take friends and acquaintance from me, but he shall not get rid of me till the time during which I must watch him shall expire. Yes, Charlie, even though you were to turn against me—which God forbid!—I should still remain—a poor despised outcast among all my former comrades."

"But surely," I answered, "his behavior towards you is quite such as to release you from any promise you may have made him. For my part, though I can't conceive what the secret can be between you two, yet I am sure, were I in your place, I should throw honor to the winds, have my revenge on him, and clear myself, as I feel convinced you could do if you chose."

He signed me to be silent with an impatient gesture. "Hush, for mercy's sake! You don't know how strong the temptation is. Don't add your voice to that of my natural selfish nature, which is urging me to forsake all the principles I have tried to live by, and drives me, with a force I find it almost impossible to resist, to clear myself from this charge, even at the cost of my honor. How long it seems since I have had any rest—harassed, worried, annoyed on every side, dark looks and inuendoes among my comrades, a perpetual conflict between my heart and my reason—I that used to be so easy-going and light-hearted! I often wonder what will be the end of it."

"You have truly had a hard time of it," I answered; "but remember, Hugh, the old proverb, 'The night is ever darkest before the dawn.' It is now as dark with you as it can well be; before long you will see light breaking through the clouds. Keep up a bold heart, and don't let your enemy think he has triumphed. I will, now I see his game, keep an eye on him; and if I find an opportunity of defending you and showing him up, depend upon me it shall not escape me."

"Thanks, dear friend," he replied, taking my hand again. "I don't know what I should have done without you; already your steadfast faith has comforted me; besides, be the night never so dark, the trial never so bitter, it behooves us to face it like men, with a firm heart and unflinching courage. None but cowards turn from danger; the brave face it the more boldly the greater it appears. I had forgotten that."

He uttered this more to himself than to me as he sat gazing out over the broad waste of waters.

"I agree with you," I said; "trials are always less if you face them boldly. Remember that there are many others, too, as well as I and those whom you like best, that will stand by you through good report and evil report. However, enough of this now; take a cigar and forget care for a time; there is nothing comforts one like a good smoke."

Hugh assented languidly, taking a cigar with the air of one who has lost all interest in life; but before long, under the soothing influence of the narcotic, he brightened up a little, and his sad face assumed a more tranquil expression. When we left our retreat no one would have guessed by his face through what an ordeal he had just passed, and the most keen-sighted among his enemies could have observed no signs of flinching when he encountered any marks of avoidance or contempt.

So we sped gayly on toward the tropics—gayly, at least, as regards the sailing of the vessel; for providentially we encountered none but favorable winds the whole way, otherwise we should have died of ennui, as it may well be imagined a certain stiffness reigned in our party, some of whom would neither look at nor speak to Melton; indeed, I was the only one who kept up really friendly relations with him; the few who did not believe Cameron's story could not quite take Melton's innocence for granted when he made no effort to bring forward proofs to establish it. Then, again, I, being his constant companion, came in for some of the odium attached to him, though for that I did not care a straw, as, with the exception of Solace and some few others, they were not worth caring about. Still it was dull, very dull, and thankful, indeed, I was that we met none of the usual calms that are generally so tiresome near the Line.

At last one evening, when we were about 26° south latitude, a fearful accident occurred, which was near ending fatally for us all. We were on deck, smoking, talking, and reading; Hugh trying to take a faint transcript of one of the most gorgeous Southern sunsets I ever beheld, and I lounging beside him, when glancing carelessly out at the foamy track left by the vessel, as she plowed her way through the rippling wavelets, I saw between me and the glowing sky a thin filmy vapor ascending. Lazily I watched for a while, as it curled and wreathed in fantastic shapes that lent a flickering softness to the brilliant tints beyond. After about ten minutes' lazy enjoyment of the novel effect, a vague wonder crept into my mind as to how it got there. Could some one be smoking, leaning out of the stern windows, or sitting among the cordage and chains? Yes, that was probably the cause of it; some of our fellows no doubt had chosen that place for a quiet chat. But who could it be? They were most of them in groups near us; I did not miss anyone. So at last, out of pure curiosity, I determined to look over and see.

"I'll be back in a minute, Hugh," I said, rising very slowly and, in spite of my curiosity, reluctantly, and making my way aft. When I arrived at the taffrail and leaned over, no one was to be seen; but, what I for a few seconds thought odd, there seemed to be hot vapor oozing through the crevices of the planking, and the air smelled so strangely. What could it be? I sniffed once or twice, and then with overwhelming force the conviction rushed through my mind—the ship was on fire. To run forward and tell the captain was the work of an instant, and a minute later it was found

that the large saloon in the stern, in which the ladies usually sat, was on fire.

Our men manned the pumps turn about with the blue jackets, and we put in our turn with the rest, Hugh throwing aside his unfinished sketch, and working like a horse at whatever came under his hand.

"Where is Captain Cameron?" asked Solace, coming up hurriedly to where we were working, carrying away all inflammable articles from the proximity of the fire. He was in his shirt sleeves like the rest of us, and though his face was pale, his voice was firm and clear as he spoke.

"I don't know," Hugh answered, shortly, as he turned to assist a marine vainly striving to move some ponderous article by his unassisted strength. "Why do you want him?" he continued, wiping the sweat from his brow, as he staggered forward with tired helper.

"Only that I haven't seen him doing any thing, and I want him to come and help us. We must all work now if we wish to live."

Suddenly from the forward part of the ship glided the man he was looking for, pale, haggard, and with big drops brought there not by toil, but by anguish and fear, standing on his brow, the very picture of abject terror.

"Oh," he cried, with a pleading gesture of the hands, "how are you getting on? Is the fire being got under? For mercy's sake, tell me quick!"

"The worst is to be feared, Captain Cameron," answered Solace, coldly, turning with disgust from the pitiable figure of his senior, for cowardice indeed changes the handsomest face into an abject and unsightly object; imagine, therefore, its effect on Cameron's sneaking countenance. For one moment he stared wildly at the brave youth, then a paroxysm of fear seized him, and forgetting all who were present—his position, duty, every thing—he raved and cursed his cruel fate in the wildest throes of mortal terror.

A minute's glance was all we could vouchsafe to this pitiable exhibition; when next we looked in that direction he was gone. A few minutes after, business took me forward, where a party of our men were taking breath after their spell at the pumps. A little apart from the silent, weary group stood Sergeant Green, and talking eagerly to him, with violent gesticulations and hurried breathing, was Cameron, whom I had so lately seen in a state bordering on lunacy from intense terror.

"Well, he's better than I thought," I observed to myself on seeing him; "he is at least encouraging the men to work, if he won't do it himself." But as I passed close behind him on my errand, judge of my surprise when I heard him say:

"We can get some of the men, sergeant; in the confusion it will be easy to slip some water and provisions on board, and then we will be off. It is the only way to escape certain death; once the fire gains the powder, it is all up with us."

"Captain," answered Green, in the same imperturbable tone he would have used on parade—"Captain," there are many men of ours on board this vessel, but I hope not one coward; then, with a salute that I fancied, in its exaggerated respect, expressed immeasurable contempt, he turned on his heel and rejoined his comrades.

How proud I felt of that man! I should have liked to have gone over and shaken hands with him, as I turned and hurried aft again, to see what other work there was for willing hands. Plenty there was of it for every one; but in spite of all efforts, the fire seemed to gain ground. Here and there spits and tongues of flame might be seen shooting up through the planks, and gleaming redly through the glass sky-lights let in here and there in the deck, while volumes of smoke would burst out now and then through some unforeseen aperture, half smothering those who might be working near. I had forgotten all about the scene I had just witnessed, when suddenly I heard Hugh's voice, in a loud,

commanding tone, proceeding from among a knot of men gathered near one of the boats forward.

Curious to see what was the matter, and thinking I might be of use, I ran over. When I reached the spot his back was towards me, and waited to hear what might be the matter before interfering. Two sailors, whom I recognized as among the blacksheep of the crew, were lowering the boat over the side, while round them stood a knot of men, about ten in all, some soldiers, some sailors, but all of them well known to me as possessing an indifferent reputation with their respective officers.

In the center of the group stood Hugh and Cameron, face to face with each other. Hugh was speaking loudly, and in an authoritative manner, with his head up and his eyes flashing.

"I tell you, Captain Cameron," he was saying as I approached, "that you shall not do this thing if I can prevent it; and you," he added, turning to the men, "return everyone of you to your duty, or I shall report you to your officers. Have you no shame that you should try to leave the ship before all hope is lost? Think of your comrades toiling till the very life is worn out of them to save themselves and the ship. Are you not ashamed to stand here concocting a villainous scheme that must deprive some at least of the chance of safety if you succeed, and that if you do not succeed will not the less cover you with infamy?"

"That is all very fine," sneered Cameron, a feeble spark of energy roused in him by hate and fear; "but if I prefer to save myself rather than stick by this cursed tub till the flames reach the powder, and if these brave fellows choose to make an effort for their lives, none shall prevent us; you, if you make another attempt to stop us, shall be pitched into the sea; I can promise you that much, I think."

Hugh laughed scornfully, and springing on the bulwarks caught hold of one of the davits to support himself, at the same time opening a large clasp-knife, with which he intended to cut the rope if obliged; at least, as he told me afterward, he intended to try and cut the rope, though well aware that his knife was a very weak weapon for such an undertaking.

As he opened the knife, Cameron, goaded to fury by the idea that his carefully prepared scheme was about to fail through Hugh's agency, aimed a blow at him with all his force. Involuntarily I sprang forward, intending to catch Cameron's arm, but before I could reach him, the blow had been delivered; missing his mark, Cameron overbalanced and fell heavily against the bulwarks, cutting himself pretty severely about the face and head. Then I caught Hugh by the arm, and dragged him down.

"What are you about," I said, breathlessly, "standing up there, where a touch would knock you over into the water? Let us take that madman, Cameron, and shut him up somewhere; it will then be easy to deal with the rest."

We turned to look for him, and perceived Solace already assisting him to rise.

"Captain Cameron," he said, "you don't know what you are doing; you are not fit to be left alone; you must come with me and help us to work."

Cameron staggered to his feet, fairly beside himself with rage.

"It is that fellow," he yelled, pointing to Hugh; "he is setting the men against me. I will be revenged for his cursed impudence."

He struggled to get free from Solace, who, however, held him firmly, and answered:

"Captain Melton did his duty, and when you are in your calm judgment you will thank him for acting as he did. Now come with me;" so saying he went off, dragging his unwilling superior after him, who turned back for one minute to mutter a fierce curse on Melton, and swear with bitter emphasis he would be revenged. A few sharp words dispersed the skulkers, and then, turning again to our work, we found that in the interim the fire had been considerably subdued, and there was now really some hope of saving the ship.

Animated by that hope, we set to work again

with a will, and in about half an hour enjoyed the luxury of resting for a few minutes without any fear of the fire, which was now completely quenched. I could hardly help laughing as I surveyed several of the most dandified young fellows in the regiment, now looking like an assemblage of chimney-sweeps and coal-heavers; indeed, some of them were so begrimed as to be almost unrecognizable. As to Hugh, now the excitement was over, he looked indeed a dismal picture; his fair hair singed, his clothes torn and dirty, and, above all, an impatient, anxious expression on his countenance. He smiled faintly as he looked at me, fancying, no doubt, that I was as queer-looking as he appeared to my eyes; but beyond this feeble attempt at merriment he seemed to make no effort to shake off his depression, and presently began to busy himself setting things as much to rights as circumstances permitted.

Next time we were alone, however, he said, "Could you have believed Cameron was such a mean-spirited ruffian? I never saw a more thorough poltroon. It adds to the perplexity I was in before. How I am to act with regard to that man I cannot tell. It would be better for a woman to die than to marry a man so utterly dead to every noble and honorable feeling."

From this remark I saw his thoughts had again reverted to Miss Meares, so I made no reply, and he pursued the subject no farther.

Though the fire placed us in rather unpleasant circumstances, from the amount of loss it entailed on many of us, and from the discomfort of the temporary accommodations we had to contrive to replace things destroyed, still it had one good effect; others besides myself had seen Cameron's behavior, and were no longer inclined to pay so much attention to his insinuations against Hugh, whose conduct had been as worthy of pride as he was of blame.

Sergeant Green had also indulged himself in making a fine story out of Cameron's proposition to him and his answer, which story rapidly spread, and soon became known to every one on board; so that gentleman, now thoroughly sobered by finding the estimation in which his conduct was held, found himself presently left pretty much to his own resources.

This fire was the only event of importance that occurred to break the monotony of our life during the voyage out. When we arrived at the Cape we made ourselves more comfortable, and replaced the most necessary of those articles that had been destroyed; but our stay was short notwithstanding and we were soon dancing over the waves of the Indian Ocean on our way to Calcutta.

How pleased we all were when, after a fearfully tedious, though on the whole rapid, voyage, we found ourselves at last slowly sailing up the Hooghly, with its gay villas and shady gardens, presenting pleasant pictures to eyes so long wearied by gazing over the monotonous expanse of ocean! How intense was our delight as we once more stood on dry land! and how really enjoyable was the week we spent in Calcutta, before proceeding up the country to the small town of A——, where we were to be stationed!

The little town lay near the Himalayas, and was at this period used as an outpost, on account of the lawless, predatory habits of some of the mountain chieftains, which rendered the constant supervision of the British government and a tolerably powerful executive necessary.

It was not a bad quarter, after all; and some of us managed to make ourselves very comfortable. There was plenty of sport, and many a good day Hugh and I had among the hills. Though at the foot of the hills, our station was intensely hot, and most tantalizing it was to see far away the summits of endless mountains rising far above the other in bewildering confusion, until their snowy peaks seemed to pierce the blue vault above. Hugh reveled in the endless beauties they spread out before him of form and color, while I took every opportunity of getting a ramble over their unexplored pathways, with my gun on my shoulder and a pleasant companion by my side.

CHAPTER VI.

CAMERON'S VISITOR.

THERE are drawbacks to every place, and the drawback to A—was, as far as I was concerned, that it did not agree with me. The intense heat brought on a kind of low fever, which, though it did not quite lay me up, yet made every pursuit, whether in connection with my duty or otherwise, a burden to me. Our medico assured me I should soon get over it; in the meantime I had better keep quiet, and avoid all exertion during the heat of the day.

So it chanced that one day, as I was lounging in an easy-chair by my window, getting the benefit of the cool breeze that at that hour (it was half past seven in the evening) was beginning to steal down from the mountains, I heard a vehicle approaching the barracks. Curiosity prompted me to raise a corner of the mat that shaded the window and look out. My window commanded a view of the drive up the compound to the door, and I saw a kind of covered carriage of primitive and dilapidated appearance driving up. It stopped at the door, and then I, still keeping myself concealed, saw seated inside a very handsome woman.

But who could she be coming to see? Every one was out with the exception of myself—Hugh sketching, a lot of the others shooting, and Cameron, I thought, visiting. As for me, I had never set eyes on this lady before; so I certainly her visit was not intended for me. I did not hear for whom she asked, but in a few minutes Cameron appeared, and then I saw I had been mistaken in supposing him away. He handed her out, and before she disappeared with him through the doorway I obtained even a better view of her than I had at first been able to do.

She was tall, with a perfect figure, which was displayed to the greatest advantage by a light muslin dress, over which was thrown carelessly a magnificent black lace shawl, that rather enhanced than concealed the effect. In stepping out of the carriage she displayed a slender foot, with an instep arched as that of an Arab, while the hand that rested ungloved on his arm was small and white, the taper fingers sparkling with jewels. A perfect hand it was, and you would have said, had you not seen the face, it must have belonged to a lady. As to her face, it was gloriously beautiful, complete in every feature, and wanting only the nameless charm of refinement, without which beauty is to some minds valueless. Imagine a broad white brow, with penciled eyebrows of the most perfect form surmounting eyes large and dark as a gazelle's; a peach-like bloom on her cheeks set off the clear olive complexion; while her mouth would have been lovely, showing, as it did, when she smiled the most perfect teeth, had it not been for the indescribable expression, more visible in the mouth than elsewhere, that we call want of refinement—imagine such a face surrounded by a profusion of raven hair, which was ornamented with the daintiest tulle bonnet, the head set gracefully on the most queenly form, and you will have some idea of the personal appearance of Cameron's strange visitor.

As she entered the doorway she spoke, and her voice sounded soft and sweet, "that most excellent thing in a woman," as it reached me; while her laugh, in answer to some remark of Cameron's, was clear and silvery; very pleasant to listen to, I thought, as I lay back in my chair thinking of that perfect face, and deciding that whatever want of refinement it indicated, it must be in mind and not in manner, as her voice and laugh convinced me that outwardly at least she was all a lady ought to be. I lay lazily in my chair by the open window, listening dreamily to the hum of voices in Cameron's room, next mine, and feeling a kind of vague pleasure in the sound of low laughter that stole out now and then on the evening air.

Presently they moved near the window, which was beside mine, not more than a yard distant at most, and I heard the woman's voice say, in persuasive accents that I am sure would have found their way round any man's heart:

"And now, dear, tell me all about this Maud Meares, that some one said you were going to marry. I only laughed when I heard it; I couldn't doubt you; still I thought when I saw you I would ask about it."

As the name of Cameron's betrothed fell on my ears I began to listen attentively; in fact, the whole sentence was so extraordinary, and this fascinating being's relation to Cameron seemed so equivocal, that I had little difficulty in persuading myself that for Miss Meares's sake, even if not for Hugh's, I was quite right to play the part of eavesdropper. Besides, I argued, if I find there is nothing wrong, it cannot matter my having listened or not. If, on the contrary, there is anything not quite as it ought to be, the sooner it is found out and that fellow's little game put a stop to the better. Drawing my easy-chair, therefore, nearer to the window, and leaning a little outside, I prepared myself for what, even when making the best of it, I felt it to be not an honorable occupation.

Cameron laughed a little at her question, and answered in a more cynical manner than I could have fancied any man would have used to such a woman:

"You were right not to mind what any fellow might report about me. You know we are married; so you are safe whatever may happen, though no one knows how we stand with regard to one another. You have kept our secret, I hope?" he added, with some sternness.

"Indeed, Edward, I have," she replied, earnestly, "though why I should do so I can't see. And when I hear such things said of you I do long to hold up my head boldly, looking people in the face, as I have a right to do, and saying, 'Your stories are false; I am his wife, and no woman shall come between us while I live.'"

"Well, well," he answered, in an impatient, bored manner—for which I felt it in my heart to kick him, so much had my sympathies been enlisted by the sweet wifely words and tender caressing manner of the beautiful stranger—"you know I don't like declamation or heroics; they bore me; and you are getting a little into that style now and then. Try and get out of it, dear. As to why our marriage should be kept a secret, I told you long ago that my embarrassments would not permit me to declare it; as to this report, why, you must encourage it as much as you can, as at present it is my only help in keeping my head above water. The Jews will wait, in hopes of reaping a golden harvest when it comes off, as this Miss Meares is a great heiress. Indeed, I have been thinking that it would not be a bad move for either you or me could it be accomplished."

There was a pause after this sentence, during which interval of silence a feeling of horror stole over me of this fair, calm-looking man, with his quick, gentle ways, his smooth, persuasive voice, and his womanish attention to personal appearance, who concealed a soul so vile, a mind so base, as not only to plan such a scheme, but to dare to talk over it boldly and openly with his young wife.

The dead silence was at last broken by that sweet voice, saying, in a hesitating tone that told an eloquent tale of horror, astonishment and pain:

"I—I—don't quite understand you, Edward, I think. Surely I can't have heard aright!"

"Oh, yes, quite right," he answered, with a laugh that sounded unpleasantly sneering. "You needn't look shocked; no harm can come to you whatever I do. Remember you are quite safe, and don't trouble your head about this Miss Meares, who is, after all, the only one to be pitied. What I want you to do is this: I am engaged to marry this Miss Meares—have been so, in fact, since we were children—and had no right to marry you. Now if you are only wise and keep our secret, what is to prevent my marrying this girl in England? I shall never bring her out here, and her money will enable me to give you those luxuries I have so longed wished to shower upon the only woman I ever met who

had sufficient attraction for me to induce me to forego the brilliant future opened out before me as the husband of the heiress Maud Meares. It is only my love for you that makes me desire this. Other men can adorn those they love with jewels and costly garments, as I would like to do my beautiful darling, while I, with all the affection I feel for you, have never been able to give you more than those few paltry trinkets that look so unworthy the beauty they adorn. And it will not harm Miss Meares either. No one will know of your existence, and she will certainly have the best of the position as my wife. After all, in other countries men may have more wives than one, though our stupid laws are against it. Still, I don't see the harm if it can be managed."

He laughed sneeringly and brutally as he finished, but a low wailing cry from his wife interrupted him.

"Oh, Edward, Edward, don't say that! What is the matter with you to-day? Don't you know that you are proposing a fearful crime? If you love me, how can you think for a moment of marrying this other woman, and letting her usurp my rightful place, no matter how great her wealth? And if you do not love me, or have found the love of your childhood dearer and sweeter than mine, how have you foresworn yourself and deceived me! Tell me, what is she like, this English heiress, with a store of gold vast enough to buy men's affection, or at least the semblance of it?"

The piteous tone died out of her voice as she asked this last question in eager jealous accents that quivered, in spite of a brave effort to be calm.

"What is she like?" he asked, lazily; and I heard him strike a fusee, preparatory to lighting a cheroot. "Well, that is a more sensible question than the tragedy-queen performance you began with, so I'll answer it. Let me see, she is small and slight; a beautiful little figure; very fair, with lots of lovely golden hair, all in loose waves like yours, but the most delicious gold-color. Indeed, her whole coloring is very brilliant and delicate, quite like one of the dainty little figures one sees sometimes in Sevres china. As a rule, heiresses are ugly and vulgar-looking, but she's a remarkable exception to the rule!"

He ceased speaking with the same lazy sangfroid; but she went on passionately:—

"Oh, why did you ever tell me you loved me! Your heart is with this blonde beauty, born to a happier fate than mine; for you love her, as she doubtless loves you, but not as I loved you—not as I love you," she corrected herself—"I, a child of this burning climate, with warmer love and fiercer hate, more intense affection, more cruel jealousy, than her cold Northern nature can feel. Was not my future dark enough, without my paltry beauty catching your idle fancy, to be the toy of a fleeting passion, and to be flung aside when you wearied of it?"

"Hush!" he said, impatiently, interrupting her. "Now you are raving, and making a fool of yourself besides. If, as you elegantly express it, you were the toy of a fleeting passion, you would not be my wife; and that you are certainly, though perhaps now I might be as well pleased if I had not been in such a hurry to put the noose round my neck. As to my loving her, believe me, dearest, you are a thousand times sweeter and more charming to me than any other woman who ever breathed. I don't care a fig for her, but I want her money; and as for her, I don't think she likes me, though I believe she tries to persuade herself she does; and I am pretty sure she cares a good deal for that hang-dog fellow, Hugh Melton, curse him!"

"Then, Edward darling," said the beauty, in a calmer voice, "how can you wish so to wrong both her and me? Of myself I will say nothing; you must know all I have to say as well as I; but only think of her. What has the poor girl done that this sin and shame should be brought upon her? Let her marry that man, if she can care for him after being engaged to you. Are you sure she doesn't love you?" she added. "Are you only telling me that about the other man to turn my suspicions aside, be-

cause you love her yourself? Swear to me you are telling me the truth. Only a little while ago, and I should not have asked you to swear—I should have believed your word; but now you are so strange I almost fear you. Why did you tell me all this, and say those dreadful things? I know you were only trying me, but I can't bear it. Promise me not to talk so any more, won't you?"

With the most coaxing and persuasive voice, in which there was still a tremor of fear and passion, she uttered these words, and I could fancy how, as she said it, her white hands wound themselves around his neck, and her beautiful lustrous eyes looked pleadingly up into his.

But blandishments and prayers were alike wasted on him; he had begun his subject, and he meant to go through with it; he continued, therefore:

"The reason she don't marry Hugh Melton is that he is a beggar, with nothing but his pay, and her fine fortune goes to the dogs, or somewhere equally satisfactory, if she does not marry me, and marry her I will. I am going home in a year's time to do it; so I would advise you to keep quiet, madam, and not spoil my little game, or it will be the worse for you."

"But I will spoil it," she cried, "I will spoil it. Do you think I will stand by quietly and see you ruin another life as you have ruined mine? Is it not enough for one woman to have married a villain, who will darken her future life by the curse of an unrequited affection, without another being dragged down by the same man to a darker misery, a deeper shame? No; I have here the copy of my marriage register; I always carry it with me, as a precious treasure at first, henceforth as a safeguard against treachery. Oh, Edward, I thought you loved me? Say you will give up all thoughts of Miss Meares; I will forgive you every thing, for I love you still: even though you had perpetrated the deed you threaten, Heaven help me, I believe I should love you even then."

"Where did you get that copy of the register?" was all the answer he vouchsafed to her passionate appeal.

"You know," she answered—and there was a sound of coming tears in her plaintive voice—"I got the copy the day we were married at St. Margaret's in Calcutta. Don't you remember? And you laughed at me, and called me a goose. Oh, in those days, Edward, you did love me, say what you will. Why can you not do so again?"

"Show me that," he answered, laughing. "Who said I didn't love you? I do, dearly; but then you must let me show it in my own way, and that's by making you as rich as I can. Yes, the copy's all correct," he continued, from which I knew she had given it to him, as desired. The next minute I heard a fusée struck, then a quick, sharp cry in the woman's voice, a sound as of some one springing rapidly forward, and then, in Cameron's cynical sneering tones, "Too late, my dear; that little relic will never comfort you or trouble me again; and perhaps you were not aware that the greater part of St. Margaret's was burned down about two months ago, and the vestry, with the books in it, was burned along with the rest."

No clamorous outcry, no passionate burst of weeping, followed this dastardly act; for a few seconds the silence was so dead that I almost thought she must have fainted; but hardly was this idea formed than it was again dispelled by hearing her moan, in a broken plaintive voice that told of more heart-felt suffering than the wildest weeping:

"Oh, Edward, how could you do that! My only safeguard; and I am your wife—you know I am."

"I never disputed that fact," he answered, in high good humor, "nor shall I as long as you keep quiet, and let no one know of your relation to me; but if I find you troublesome, you are without proofs, remember, and I shall remember that also; so beware, for no credit will be given to your assertion unbacked by proof."

She had borne every insult, every stinging

sneer, quietly hitherto, but now her spirit rose up against her tyrant and tormentor, the man who, alas for her! she yet loved; she turned on him with defiant words and a tone almost of hate vibrating in her voice; there was no quick-drawn breath, so sobbing sound, such as other women would have been unable to restrain; quietly and distinctly, one by one, her words fell on the soft evening air.

"Very well," she said, "let this be a bargain between us; I will say nothing, and keep out of sight and notice as long as you desire, thereby proving myself willing to obey you as a wife should. But if you go near this woman, this heiress, with words of love that belong only of right to me—if you, who are bound both by the laws of God and man to me, dare to speak of marriage to her—I swear that I will follow you, even though I had to beg my bread by the way; I would follow you across the ocean that would then separate us, and into her stately home, to expose you in your right character, and to proclaim my rights before all men. Heaven help me then!—I, who loved you when I thought you faithful, tender, and noble above all men; I, who love you still, when I know you viler than the vilest pariah in the empire—for then your spirit, cold and cruel as it is now, will turn tenfold more against me, and I shall fall a victim to your hate, as I did when I married you to your pretended love."

She paused, overcome by the violence of her emotion; for as she had continued speaking, more passion, more intense misery, were betrayed by her tone; and he, without waiting for her to continue, if she had intended to do so, went on;

"Very well done indeed, Julia. I should advise you, instead of begging your bread when you want to raise the wind, to take to the tragic stage; you would bring down the house if you looked and acted like that; in the meantime it is waste of talent to declaim at me any longer; besides, it is getting late, and those fellows will be coming back. You put up at Booderabad, don't you? Stop there for a day or two, and I will go over and see you. Wait, you must have something to eat before you go, you look really tired. I am afraid after all, you haven't strength for a tragedy queen; you would get done up in no time."

Talking in this half-sneering, half-affectionate manner, I heard him moving about the room, and presently ordering some refreshment to be brought up. In the meantime I was told my horse was waiting for me (I was in the habit of riding at this hour), and though longing to hear if anything more of interest would pass between this curious couple, I thought it best to go out, consoling myself by reflecting that I knew all it was necessary I should know. Hardly thinking of where I was going, I turned my pretty Arab's head in the direction of Booderabad, and set off at a rapid pace. It was my object to get as much exercise that evening into as short a space of time as possible, so I gave my little steed his head, and away he went through the deepening gloom at the rate of a fox-hunt.

It was a pretty hilly road, shadowed on either side by groves of stately trees, interspersed with the little gardens attached to the huts of the natives. Not a very lonely road either, as it was a favorite resort with the residents of the little town of A—; and for a mile or two I met no end of people I knew. At last the road became more deserted, and I fell into deep thought about what I had just heard. The moon rose red and full in the heavens; my little Arab, with praiseworthy attention to his own interests, slackened his pace, gradually dropping into a walk; but I neither saw nor felt anything. I thought only with impotent anger of Cameron's brutality, and of the lovely and tender woman whom a cruel fate had placed so completely in his power. I wished much that I knew her, and could offer her counsel and advice; I fancied, with a friend to protect her and support her interests, she would be able to make better terms with her ruffianly husband. My chance was nearer than I expected. While I rode on thought-

fully, pondering on the ways and means of making her acquaintance, a rumbling noise in the distance, and an uneasy motion on the part of my horse, roused me out of my reverie, and obliged me to concentrate my attention on what then came under my eyes.

Before me the road took a sudden bend, following the course of the river, along the banks of which it ran. There was no parapet or wall of defense between the road and the river, only the smooth edging of greensward, and the water just there looked deep and dark. The moon had risen bright and full; it was by its light I made these observations; but nothing lay before me that could account for the restlessness manifested by my horse. The rumbling noise continued, and seemed to approach nearer, coming from behind. I turned and gazed back over the road I had traveled, gleaming white in the moonlight, and presently fancied I could discern a dark object moving along it with considerable velocity. Prompted by curiosity I turned and rode to meet it; but I had hardly gone a few yards when I became aware that the dark object was a carriage bearing down on me with the rapidity of lightning. A glance sufficed to show that the horse was running away. Indeed, I found out afterward that the driver had been smoking opium, and when the horse took fright he was incapable of either managing it or keeping his seat, and fell off into a heap of dust by the roadside, where he was found next day fast asleep and quite comfortable.

Though I was not at the first minute aware there was no driver, yet I saw plainly that unless help was speedily rendered, carriage, occupants and horse must all go into the river, which was deep enough there to make the mere idea of such a contingency unpleasant. I turned, therefore, and as the runaway approached, put my little Arab into a brisk canter, increasing gradually to a quicker pace: when the vehicle came up with me, I, galloping beside the horse, seized his rein. We were now so close to the river, going so fast and so straight at it, that there was no possibility of our stopping before we should get to the brink. However, by a great exertion of strength, and thanks to the excellent training of my steed, we swung round the curve of the road so close to the water that the outside wheel must have been on the verge of the bank. That danger past, I breathed freely; and although it took me some time to stop the furious animal, I succeeded at last, and when he was fairly at a stand, it seemed to me he was not likely to run away again soon. He was covered with foam from head to foot, reeking with sweat, and seemed so done up that his limbs trembled under him. He was not a bad-looking beast, and I dare say when fresh had a temper of his own, which accounted for the scene in which I had just played a part. Leaving my gallant little Sultan at liberty, but still holding fast the reins of the runaway, I approached the door of the vehicle. It was one of those curious covered conveyances with curtains drawn all round, resembling the arabas of the Turkish women, and it seemed somehow familiar to my eyes. Yes, as I looked at it again, I became convinced that it was the same curious vehicle that had excited my wonder that evening as it drove up to the barracks. With more eagerness than I had yet felt, I approached the curtained aperture that served for a door, and drawing back the screen peered anxiously in. I had hardly look in when a dark form bent forward from the interior, and said, in Hindoostanee:

"Are we safe, Mahmoud? What was the matter? I thought we should have been killed."

The voice was the same sweet voice I had heard in Cameron's room, but it trembled now a little from fear, as it then had from passion. It was evident she did not know that her servant had been to blame, and also that he had disappeared—where or how I could not at that time tell. I stepped back a little to let the moonlight stream into the carriage, and answered:

"Mahmoud is not here, madam; I am a stranger. I happened to be passing, and was fortunate enough to be able to stop your horse,

which was running away. Where your driver can be I am unable to imagine, but I hope you will allow me to assist you in any way you may desire. If you will tell me where you live, I will conduct you home."

She seemed frightened on hearing a strange voice, and at first shrank back into the dark recesses of the carriage; as I went on, however, curiosity mastered fear, and I could see her lean forward eagerly to catch sight of my face in the moonlight. I bore her scrutiny calmly, though it was long and keen; indeed, I was beginning to feel uncomfortable, not knowing what to say next, when she answered: "I will trust you; I think I may; your face looks kind, and I have no one here to help me. I do not live near here, but I am staying at Booderabad. I am stopping in one of the bungalows on this side of the town; Mrs. Camden's. You can ask some one to direct you to it when we get near there, if it is not troubling you too much to ask you to drive me."

"Not any trouble at all; I shall be most happy," I answered, though wondering a little how on earth I was to get back to A—that night, and thinking what a row Ali (my syce) would make when his pet, Sultan, did not return at the usual time. However, the lady seemed to have nothing farther to say; so I got into my saddle again, and started the jaded steed on its homeward road in a broken shambling trot. A weary ride that was to me, at first flogging the tired brute till I was in a white heat and completely exhausted; then at length toiling along at a foot-pace, scolding, coaxing, and otherwise encouraging the animal, that all the time paid no attention to my blandishments, but chose his own pace with a sublime disregard of any convenience but his own. Ten weary miles we thus passed over before reaching the little town of Booderabad. The moon was setting, it was about one o'clock in the morning; in another two hours people would be bestirring themselves; but in the meantime here we were at Booderabad, and no one could be seen either to guide me to Mrs. Camden's, or, after I arrived there, to tell me where I might find a place to rest myself and horse before morning. At this moment the curtain at the door of the carriage was drawn back and the lady looked out, trying in the dim light to make out the bungalow to which she wished to be driven.

After several wrong turns and bewildering mistakes we at last arrived at the right house, where, however, we were kept nearly half an hour knocking before any one came to let us in. The lady, before going in, thanked me in the most earnest manner for the service I had been able to render her, and when she entered I delivered the vehicle and horse to the servant, and followed him with my own, in hopes of finding some place where I might put up. As I expected, I found accommodation for my horse at the stable where the vehicle had been hired, but was not quite so fortunate with regard to myself, as it was fully half an hour later before I found myself housed at last in a hot and not over-comfortable lodging. I might have been worse off, however, and besides was tired; so that I was soon fast asleep, and forgot for a time the startling discoveries of the day and Ali's anxieties at my non-appearance.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

WHEN I awoke the next day the sun was too high for me to think of returning until the evening. I accordingly determined to call and inquire after my acquaintance of the previous evening before returning to A—. At about six o'clock, therefore, I sallied forth, and soon found myself at the bungalow where I had stood knocking for so long in vain the night before. This time I was not kept waiting, but was immediately admitted. Mrs. Cameron—for so I knew her to be, though of course I did not so address her—was reclining on a sofa near the window, languidly embroidering flowers on a piece of silk. She looked thoroughly

worn out by her long vigil of the past night, and I thought there was a more heart-broken expression in her pale face than could be accounted for by any one who had not overheard, as I had done, her yesterday's dialogue with her brutal husband.

She seemed pleased to see me, and roused herself into something like animation, while she thanked me again fervently for my assistance the night before. After she had done, I ventured to ask her name, saying that I hoped she would excuse my taking such a liberty in consideration of the services she was pleased to say I had rendered her. At this she colored violently, and fidgeted nervously with the work she still held in her fingers; but at length replied: "I cannot tell you how sorry I am not to be able to answer your question; one, too, which I think you have quite a right to ask, after having been put to so much inconvenience and trouble by me. It is not my secret, however; it is my—husband's." She paused before saying the last word, and added it in so low a tone that I could hardly catch it.

I was now quite at a loss how to proceed; for you may well imagine I had come to call with the full intention of telling Mrs. Cameron all that I had overheard, and also that I intended to repeat it to both Hugh Melton and Miss Meares. When I saw her in her pale fragile beauty before me, looking so sad and sorrowful, I felt almost as if I should be committing a crime by saying anything to agitate and annoy her; yet I knew that it must be done, and that it would be better for her to know the worst, that she might prepare herself for meeting her husband when he should know his wicked plans were discovered. I therefore continued in as cool and unconcerned manner as I could assume: "It does not matter; I only asked for form's sake, as I know your name, Mrs. Cameron."

She started violently as I pronounced her name, and turned on me a white, despairing face as she exclaimed: "You know it! How did you discover it? Oh, for heaven's sake tell me! What shall I do? He will never forgive me!"

She did not cry hysterically or loudly; but I could see from the trembling of her slender fingers as she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes that her grief was more intense and painful than more noisily expressed emotion. I tried to comfort her as best I could, saying that it was from her husband quite as much as from herself I had heard it, and that I should not have mentioned my discovery to her, knowing well her desire to keep it secret, only for the fact that I was bound to tell it to my friend, Captain Melton, who was interested very nearly in the matter, and to Miss Meares, whom Captain Cameron had designed to be the sufferer by his crime. Beyond us three the story should not go, and Captain Cameron might feel himself perfectly safe if only he would renounce his designs. I then went on to explain how I became acquainted with the fact of her relation to Captain Cameron, at first hearing without intending, afterward listening long and earnestly from design; my motive I considered being such as to absolve me of all wrong-doing in the matter. On hearing how I became acquainted with her story all traces of grief and sorrow were for a moment smothered in the fierce blaze of resentment and scorn with which she turned on me.

"Is it possible," she said, fronting me with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks, "that you can have been base enough to play the part of a spy on two people in no way connected with you, and with no object? I should not have thought such meanness possible had you not accused yourself." As she spoke she rose and turned to leave the room.

"Stay one moment and hear me," I entreated. "You say I played the part of a spy without an object, in that you are mistaken, and it was to explain that object to you that I mentioned the subject at all. The honor and happiness of two friends of mine, one of them dearer to me than anything else on this earth, are intimately connected with this discovery; besides, I had some faint hope I might have been

a friend to you, and by my knowledge of the fact as it is have stood between you and your husband's wrong-doing?"

"Who are you," she answered, haughtily, "to accuse my husband of wrong-doing? Allow me to be the judge of that. As to your friends, I suppose you love Miss Meares, from what you say, or perhaps her money, and would be glad, by marrying Captain Cameron's chance, to secure your own."

This was too much, and I began to feel angry; but by a violent effort succeeded in preserving my composure.

"So be it," I answered; "if you think the case stands thus I shall not contradict you, as surely you must see that even if I only married her for her money, it would be better and happier far I should do so than that she should fall a victim to Captain Cameron's criminal designs. I came to you to-day with the intention of entreating you to join me in defeating them. If you have a woman's heart you will surely aid me in saving this hapless girl, whose vast wealth has as yet only served to render her a mark for the machinations of scheming villains. As for me, if you think I design to profit by any assistance you might render to break off her engagement to Captain Cameron, I will willingly promise once she knows all never to see her again."

"Then," she said, with wide, astonished eyes, "you do not love her? Are you not Captain Melton, of whom I have heard Captain Cameron speak?"

"No, indeed," I answered; "he is the friend of whom I spoke, as dear to me as my own life; it is for his happiness, not my own, I solicit your help. Surely you will not refuse my request."

"And does he love the girl?" she asked, in a dreamy, irrelevant manner, as though she had only half heard my answer.

"He does," I replied, "as you love Edward Cameron, as you once fancied he loved you." I thought I saw signs of relenting in her mood as she stood, half turned away from me, in a pensive attitude, evidently pondering all she had just heard.

"In that case he will deceive her and make her miserable, as Edward has done me," she answered, impulsively; then, seeing she had made an admission she never intended to have made, she went on with the view of changing the subject: "Why do you love Captain Melton so dearly? Is he nobler and wiser and truer than other men? He should be to merit your devotion."

"He is all that, and more," I replied, eagerly, feeling that I had, without knowing it, touched some hidden chord in her heart, and anxious to pursue any advantage; "he is a man whose life is noble and upright before the world, generous and tender to his friends, who has helped many a wandering soul back into the right path, and who, even in his conduct toward your husband, his rival, has shown himself worthy of all praise."

"Then he cannot love her," she answered, quickly, "or, noble though he might be, he would have stood his ground and struggled for her against all comers, be they who they might, notwithstanding and in spite of any previous engagements. I cannot feel pity for your friend; he is a cold-blooded, cold-hearted lover, not one who would serve for the woman he loved through life to death, as true love should, overbearing and overcoming all obstacles."

"That is one kind of love," I answered, moved in spite of myself by her earnestness; "and do not think but that a man like my friend, ardent, passionate, impulsive, must have longed, as only such bold natures can long, to set the world at defiance and obtain his love, in spite of her parents' wishes, her plighted troth, and her own qualms of conscience. But there is another nobler and purer love—surely you know it—a love that desires the good of the beloved object only, and is content to suffer if that object may be happy. Melton hoped long, hopes still, perhaps, that he acted for her good in yielding to Cameron's claim; but how can I, knowing what I know, allow him to continue in

this belief, when surely sooner or later the truth will come to light, and he will see that far from securing her happiness he has only brought about her shame? They were made for each other. Think what happiness you may confer on them by standing forward now and releasing them from their self-imposed misery."

As I ceased speaking she turned toward me with a smile.

"I have heard of Orestes and Pylades," she said, "but never could form any idea of what their freindship was like until now; but for the sake of argument we will suppose for a moment (what, remember, I have never admitted) that Captain Cameron is my husband. Am I to prefer the happiness of these two strangers to my husband's good? I think your creed somewhat curious. I am to be faithful to the cause of true love as exemplified by this interesting couple, while to my love for my own husband I may be as false as I please." She paused here, the flush dying out of her cheeks; then, with a face set and as rigid as marble, she went on: "But I entirely deny the truth of what you have overheard, and in support of what I say I refer you to Captain Cameron himself, who will doubtless satisfy your mind upon that matter."

As she finished speaking she tottered a few paces forward, groping like a blind person for some support on which to lean, and had I not caught her and led her to the sofa she would have fallen.

I felt that I could do nothing more than I had done, and that the poor lady was too much troubled to hear anything more on that subject; I therefore turned to summon an attendant with whom I might leave her, when, coming with his usual noiseless, cat-like step through the open doorway, I beheld Captain Cameron himself. As yet his wife had not perceived him, and for a second or two we stood looking at each other without moving or uttering a word, so completely were we taken aback. Cameron's self-possession never deserted him for long, however, and after the first startled pause he began:

"How did you become acquainted with this lady, Cairnsford? I was not aware that she had any friends in our regiment except myself."

As he spoke he advanced and held out his hand with a coolness and ease of manner that would have thrown any one not acquainted with the facts of the case off the scent.

It was no good my beating about the bush. I knew he was sure to find out from his wife the extent of my knowledge the minute I had left; I therefore answered him boldly:

"I had the pleasure of making Mrs. Cameron's acquaintance yesterday evening, as she was returning from A—. I was not aware until yesterday that you were married; I always fancied you were engaged to Miss Meares."

When I spoke of Mrs. Cameron he started visibly, and a look came over his face I thought it just as well she did not see, her face being covered with her hands; but as I went on, intending to complete his discomfiture by the mention of Miss Meares, he recovered himself, and I found that, as many others have done, I had injured the effect of my speech by saying too much, instead of adding to its force, as I had intended.

"My wife!" he said, laughing scornfully, as I finished. "Why, Cairnsford, who would ever have thought you soft enough to believe such a story? What you say about Miss Meares is perfectly true, and therefore, you see, I cannot have a wife already, though you are so blind as to present to me one as lovely as the lady before us."

His sneering, cynical manner and jeering smile enraged me. I felt somehow that this man, who had not truth or good intentions on his side, was more than a match for me, though I was doing what I thought right to the best of my ability. Exasperated beyond all bounds of circumspection and self-control, I turned to his wife and endeavored to obtain her witness.

"Do you hear, Mrs. Cameron," I said, "what this man, your husband says? Your lot is indeed sad; but consider how much more terri-

ble it will be if you allow him to work out his villainous scheme, and bring dishonor not on you alone, but on others. Do not be afraid to speak the truth boldly; I will protect you, and see that no harm shall befall you from his baffled rage."

"Cairnsford, you are mad!" said Cameron, interrupting her, as she raised her head from her hands and turned toward me about to speak. "You have been deceived by appearances, though how a man of the world like you could have been so deceived I don't know. I have known this lady since she was a child, certainly; indeed, her father on his death-bed commended her to my care, I being the only friend that remained to him; but it is false that she is my wife, as, whatever interest the pitiful circumstances in which she was left may have inspired in me, I could not consent to give up my brilliant prospects and forego my marriage with Miss Meares, whose fortune, after all, is only a small part of her attractions. And now, as I have done my best to explain the matter to you, I will not detain you any longer." He looked toward the door as he finished this speech in his easy, impudent manner; but I pretended not to hear him, and turning to the lady said:

"Mrs. Cameron, have you nothing to say to all this?"

Then she rose and stepped forward a pace or two, looking bewildered, like one in a dream. At last with an effort she spoke, and her voice though low was clear, as she said:

"Why do you torture me farther? Have I not told you that whatever Captain Cameron tells you of me you must believe? Was it only to force me to acknowledge my misery that you saved me last night from the waters of the Boodra? You meant well, no doubt, but you have only caused me anguish and shame. Captain Cameron's explanation you must except as the simple truth, and do not think me ungrateful if I beg that our acquaintance may come to an end from this moment." As she finished speaking she threw herself once more on the couch, and seemed no longer to be aware of our presence.

Cameron laughed lightly.

"Julia, you see, is a woman of good sense, and she knows she cannot lay claim to the position your knight-errantry would place her in. You understand, Cairnsford, that though I do not intend to quarrel with you this time, I don't like this kind of thing, and must beg you will not repeat it. I do believe that mad fellow Melton put you up to it; it is like his confounded impudence, and I know he is dying to cheat me out of the heiress. However, I won't keep you any longer. Good-by; I dare say I shall see you to-morrow at A—."

Disgusted with them both, and, above all, with myself, I left the house, and mounting Sultan was soon a good way on my return to A—.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOLACE IN DIFFICULTIES.

SULTAN and I did not let the grass grow under our feet on our way back to A—. It seemed that rapid motion relieved the tumult of angry feelings which raged within me, while my little Arab had, no doubt, his own motives for exertion in the thoughts of the comfortable stable and good feed that lay before him. So it chanced that when I arrived I found our fellows only just sitting down to dinner. They were late that day, most of them having been out on a grand pig-sticking expedition. I was in time to join them, and found myself obliged to defer all conversation with Hugh till a more convenient opportunity. During dinner I noticed that Solace looked both sulky and melancholy, which, to say the truth, was not unusual with him, though when he was put out he certainly sometimes assumed that form.

"Well, Baby, what is wrong with you to-day?" I inquired. I may observe that Solace had gone by the endearing epithet of Baby ever since he had joined us, one of the greenest ensigns ever produced by the Green Isle. Solace looked blacker than ever, and muttered, "Nothing that

I know of;" but Langham from the other side called out, "Oh, by-the-way, Cairnsford, you have not heard of Baby's troubles. I must tell you them, and I think you will agree with me in seeing the urgent necessity for procuring an ayah directly."

Several others now laughed, and Solace began to look seriously angry; but James, always good-natured, smoothed down his rising ire by saying, "Never mind, old fellow, you will have a laugh at him some day, and you must learn to bear this sort of chaff; for if you show you do not like it, they will take care to give you enough of it. Join in the laugh, and it will not hurt you." The young fellow brightened a little at this, and glanced with a smile at Langham, as though to say, "Tell away and do your worst. I am ready." Langham laughed too—he was not a bad sort of fellow, only he could not resist a joke, and a ridiculous story about any of his comrades afforded such fine scope for ornamental embellishment.

"Well," he said, "you all know, or at least Cairnsford does not know—that we went up yesterday evening to Cumberland—Major Crookley's place. You know him—the husband of that hideous woman (Hecate, we generally call her) who thinks herself a beauty, and is coquette *a faire peur*. Her husband is jealous of her; and no wonder, as she is always fishing for new followers, though I do not think she is very successful; at which I am not surprised. How Crookley came to marry her is beyond my understanding."

"Oh, do you not know?" cried Brabazon. "I heard the whole story the other day from Soames, of the 9th. It seems Crookley came here a very green young fellow, and this Miss Loudon—then, of course, many years younger, though, I believe, not one bit better looking—set her cap at him. She had plenty of money, but she was fearfully plain, even then, and had, moreover, a way with her that made most fellows fight shy of her. Crookley was introduced to her, and, once she had got hold of him, she kept him, on some pretext or other, running after her, until one night, at a dance, where he was foolish enough to go without the protection of a superior officer—in which respect, happily for the regiment, Solace was more fortunate—he inadvertently made use of the somewhat high-flown expression, 'May I solicit the honor of your hand'—'for the next dance,' he would have said; but she interrupted him quickly with, 'Dear Charlie, as you love me so well, and seem so truly to desire it, I am yours. Call on papa to-morrow, early in the morning. For the present, I must say good-night, as we are going.' And she slipped off, leaving the unfortunate young fellow too dumbfounded to speak or to move. A comfortable night he must have passed, I should fancy; but at last he decided there was nothing for it but to call next day at her home and explain the mistake."

"Call he did, accordingly, and asked for Miss Loudon. He was shown into the drawing-room, where she presently came to him, apparently only just returned from riding, as she was in her hat and habit. She welcomed him with great *empressement*, but he, though feeling a little uneasy, rushed boldly at the matter in hand, and began—"I fear, Miss Loudon, you must have misunderstood some words I made use of last night in requesting the honor of your hand for a dance. What I meant"—

"Oh no—not at all," she interrupted. "I understood you perfectly, dear Charlie, and have given it to you fully and freely, as you see;" at the same time laying her hand on his. "Some one was saying to me just now that people might say I had misunderstood; but I answered that anyone who dared say so to me I should, with my own hand, horsewhip within an inch of his life." And she gave the strong cutting whip she held in her hand a switch through the air, within an inch of his shoulders, as she spoke. "So you see, Charlie dear, there is not the least need to dread ill-natured remarks, and papa is ready to see you now. I told him all about it, and he will give me handsome settlements; we need not wait for your promotion; but can fix the day at once. I will

go with you to papa, as he is sometimes difficult to get on with for those who do not understand him.

"That is the way Crookley was hooked, according to Soames's account, and to look at her, one would think it likely enough. I hear she keeps the identical riding-whip that conquered the major under a glass case in her own room. The fear of it is what keeps him, in general, in such awe of her, I should imagine. Now, go on, Langham, and tell us what happened to Solace."

"Where was I?—you have put me out," said Langham, peevishly. He liked to have all the talking to himself, and left aggrieved that Brabazon should have interrupted his story. "Oh, I was telling you we went up to Cumberland for croquet, with the prospect of a dance afterward. I need not tell you that if Solace has a marked failing, it is a strong tendency toward a mild flirtation, enjoyed quietly, without too much excitement, over an ice or a jelly at a dance, or by the help of the language of flowers during a stroll in the country. That is his style. Rather too much in the milk-and-water line for me, as he always keeps half his mind on the watch for danger signals, and only goes into the business with the other half; but *chacun a son gout*, and it is certainly the wisest way, after all.

"Well, yesterday he had not been long at croquet when his till then unoccupied fancy became attracted by Miss Loudon, a half-sister of Mrs. Crookley's, and without doubt a very pretty girl, only just come out from England to live with her sister. She and Mrs. Crookley are about the same height, and—I suppose through some caprice of Mrs. Crookley's—they were that day dressed alike; besides that they resembled each other in the color of their hair and their tone of voice—both, in fact, speak curiously alike; so that unless you saw their faces, you could not by the voice distinguish one from the other. Miss Loudon is, however, as pretty as her sister is the reverse, and I could hardly wonder at Baby's unsophisticated mind being caught by so attractive an object. And then her get-up was sweetly pretty, and she wore the palest cream-colored gloves, that fitted to perfection; and she had an artless way of requiring the croquet balls to be settled under the prettiest arched instep that any man ever had the pleasure of beholding. His weakness was excusable, after all. We can pardon it; but for the safety of the regiment, my dear friends, let us all beg him next time to look before he speaks.

"He, of course, joined in a game of croquet, playing on the same side as the young lady I have been describing. I thought I should get more fun out of the thing by strolling about, and now and then looking on; and so, I think, it turned out.

"Shortly after the game commenced, Major Crookley, of whose relationship to Miss Loudon Baby was ignorant, and was consequently fiercely jealous of their evident intimacy, had a run of wonderful good luck, and went flying about the ground, displacing every one, to the triumph of his friends and anger of his foes, who whispered loudly, 'Did you ever see such barefaced spooning?' 'Such a fluke!' etc. At length he approached Miss Loudon's ball, croqueted it, and with one powerful blow sent it flying far over the boundary of the croquet ground.

"'Oh, dear!' she cried plaintively, 'that is me. How could you be so cruel? At any rate, you will bring it back to the edge of the ground.'

"'Is it yours? I did not know. You can bring it back yourself, or make Mr. Solace do it for you, if you do not want the trouble,' he answered, carelessly, going on with his game.

"She turned to Solace, who was standing beside her, with an appealing gesture.

"'You hear what he says. I do not want to go all that way. Would you go and get it for me? And do you think you could manage to put it down in good position without being observed? I am such a bad hand at croquet, I shall never get on unless I am helped.'

"'He ought to do it himself when he sends a lady's ball so far off the ground,' answered Solace; 'but I am glad he did not, for my own sake, as it gives me the opportunity of being useful to you.'

"With which touching speech he picked up the ball, and, with great adroitness, contrived to place it in excellent position, as he thought, unseen by any one. Major Crookley was, however, too devoted to his game and too proud of his success not to be very well aware of the exact spot where he had left each ball, and just as Solace had settled Miss Loudon's ball to her liking, Crookley called out:

"'Why, what is that? I say, Solace, where are you putting that ball? It has no business there.'

"'Oh yes; I assure you that is its place,' Solace answered, trying to look unconcerned.

"'And I assure you that is not its place, and I will not have it there,' said the Major, angrily. 'I must request you to allow people to move their own balls on this ground, and not to infringe the rules of the place.'

"'I was not aware that bringing back a lady's ball when it had been sent over the boundary was an infringement of rules,' replied Solace, sulkily; 'under the circumstances I think you should have fetched it yourself, which would have obviated all this.'

"'Oh, you think so, do you? I wonder who asked your opinion,' said Major Crookley, insultingly. (He is always rather hasty, and his temper was now thoroughly up.) 'I think ladies are as well able to fetch their balls as gentlemen; and I shall make it a rule in future, on my ground, that they do so.'

"'Then I should think very few ladies will honor your ground with their presence,' said Solace, whose back was up, as the Yankees say.

"'Might I ask what you mean by that speech?' asked the major.

"'I mean what I say,' replied Solace.

"'I suppose you wish to insinuate by it that I am no gentleman,' continued Crookley, getting more and more excited as his opponent became more sulky and uncompromising.

"'You may put what interpretation you like on it,' answered Solace. 'Anything will suit, I dare say.'

"'Come, come, this will not do,' said Melton, just then stepping forward (he was there, too, for a wonder). 'Solace, you should not have transgressed the rules of the ground, and you, Major, are, I am sure, putting an interpretation on his words. Solace never would have given them. Do not let us spoil a pleasant party by such a foolish dispute. I want to go in the game, and I cannot get a mallet. Solace, give me yours, and take a stroll with Langham. He will show you all the beauties of the place, while the Major and I will see which is the best man at croquet.'

"So the Baby, swelling with indignation, was turned over to me to bear-lead about the place, while Melton went in for croquet and flirtation with pretty Miss Loudon, whose blandishments, I fear, excited more response from our steady captain than they should have done, as I heard her tell her sister afterward Captain Melton was an angel, and he had the most perfect eyes she had ever looked at."

"Come, Langham, draw it mild, if you please," remonstrated Melton, laughing; "your ears are too good, my dear fellow, and in repeating what they hear, I fear you sometimes say more than your prayers. Besides, consider my feelings; I know I ought to blush, but am so hardened I cannot get one up, even to save my reputation before you all."

"Is that all?" I said, as Langham proceeded to refresh himself with a draught of iced Moselle cup. "I thought there was something more coming; but indeed that was foolish enough. Baby, my child, I hope you will be cautious, or the charming Amelia may have a chance of holding the horse-whip over your shoulders, as her sister did over Major Crookley's."

"You are as bad as the rest, Cairnsford," laughed Solace, with more good temper than

he had at first shown. "Why should not I admire a pretty girl, if I see one? and why should not I help her when she is in difficulties, if she asks me?"

"Why should he not, poor fellow?" chimed in Marshman. "Of course he should, if he likes; we only want to keep him from running his innocent little head into a very dangerous slip-noose, from which he will never be able to extricate it if he once gets it in."

"What are all you fellows making such a noise about? I have not half finished my story; and I declare one would think it was a ladies' committee-room, the noise and chatter are so great. Silence, there, gentlemen, and let me continue," cried Langham.

Order being restored immediately on this appeal, he went on, disregarding the plaintive looks of Solace, who would evidently have been just as well pleased had no farther disclosures been made of his yesterday's proceedings.

"After croquet," continued the indefatigable Langham, "it was proposed that we should dance, and I need not tell you Baby lost no time in obtaining the first dance from Miss Loudon. Not content with one he asked for another, which was readily granted. As she gave it she said, 'If I am not in the room when our dance begins, I shall be in the garden near the ruined temple; it is a favorite seat of mine; it is so pleasant to steal away between the dances, and rest in the cool, evening air, among the ruins all covered with plants and flowers.' Solace muttered something I did not hear quite, though I was close by at the time, about her being the fairest flower of all; but I suppose she heard it, as she smiled brightly, and went off with her partner. Now comes the dreadful part of the story, Cairnsford. I am sorry I have been so long coming to it, but it was necessary to explain everything.

"When the time drew near for his dance, Solace, not seeing the lady anywhere in the rooms, went to the garden to look for her. There she was, sitting in the appointed place. He could not see if she was pleased at his punctuality as he approached, as there was no moon that night, and the stars, though brilliant, did not light up the garden sufficiently for him to observe the expression of her face. She did not speak and he began: 'I knew I should find you here when I saw you were not in the dancing-room. I have been counting the minutes till our turn should come round again.'

"'Do you, really, then, like dancing with me so much?' she replied. 'But it is only the nonsense people like you talk. You think, because you are here to-day and there to-morrow like a butterfly, you are privileged to show in your character all the inconstancy usually ascribed to that insect.'

"'Indeed you wrong me,' Baby replied, earnestly; 'you do not know how I have looked forward to this dance. But even if you do not believe what I say, do me one favor. Give me one flower out of your bouquet, that I may keep in remembrance of this evening; you cannot refuse me this little request. Just that one rosebud; you will not, I am sure, be so cruel as to refuse it; there is no harm in it.'

"'No harm in it, indeed!' said a man's voice behind them. 'I like that. Sir, I say there is harm in it; and you will have to do without a flower from this lady, as I shall not allow her to give you one.'

"'And what business have you to interfere between me and any lady to whom I may make such a harmless request, I should like to know?' asked Solace, haughtily.

"'I will very soon show you what right I have to interfere,' roared the major, for it was none other than he, springing forward in an ungovernable passion, at the same time flinging away a cigar he had until that moment carried lighted in his hand, and aiming a blow at Solace's face with the white kid glove he had just been about to put on before returning to the dancing room. Solace, seeing his intent, stepped back quickly, and escaped untouched; but the insult

was too marked, and turning away, he said, 'You shall hear from me again on this matter, Major Crookley. A friend of mine will come to you here immediately, as the affair had better be settled at once before it gets wind, when the authorities would interfere.'

"Very well, sir," answered the major, becoming calm enough when he perceived his insult had been taken up in the way he wished. "I shall wait here for half an hour for your friend. If he does not come before that time expires, I shall think even worse of you than I at present do."

"Almost beside himself with rage, Solace walked off to me, and related what had occurred, begging me to act as his second, and to appoint a meeting at half-past four o'clock, in a secluded spot just outside the garden, on the banks of the river."

"I tried at first to reason our friend Baby out of this absurd idea, representing that duels were forbidden by the regulations of the service, and that it would cost him his commission; but you have no notion how stiff an infantile mind can be until you have been placed in a position like mine."

"Seeing I could not persuade him to listen to reason, I called Melton, who was equally unsuccessful, and who was at last obliged to say: 'Well, Langham, if it must be, I should advise you to go and see Major Crookley; the half hour is nearly up, and it will not do to let him think any of our regiment were defaulters in an affair of honor. Stay, I will go with you, as really I think there must be some mistake. I do not think the major can be such a fool as to object to his sister-in-law giving a flower to anyone she chooses. Solace, you wait here till we return.'

"We accordingly went to the garden, and in the appointed spot found Major Crookley. 'Ah,' he cried, on seeing us, 'you have only just saved yourselves; the half-hour is almost up, and if you had not come in time to settle this little business, I should have been obliged to punish your young friend some other way, instead of giving him the satisfaction of a gentleman, as I had intended.'

"Well, but, major," said Melton, 'will you tell us what it is all about? For Solace tells us it is about a flower he was begging from a lady; but that seems quite too foolish to believe. I am sure there must be some misunderstanding.'

"Misunderstanding, indeed!" replied the major, excitedly; 'it was a great deal too plain to me. I had come to sit out here in the cool night air with my wife, who was tired of dancing; I left her for a moment to go and light a cigar at a lamp in the veranda, and when I returned I found this fellow sitting beside her making love to her, and begging for flowers and keepsakes and what not. I just told him my mind straight out, and I will not say I did not provoke him to challenge me, but then I was quite justified in doing so by the circumstances of the case; and I will give the young puppy a lesson that will teach him not to meddle with other men's wives in future.'

"As the major mentioned that it was his wife from whom Solace had begged the flowers, Melton started, and laid his hand on my arm to prevent my speaking. When the account was finished, he said: 'You certainly had great provocation, Major Crookley, and I regret that any officer of "ours" should have given you such grave cause of complaint; but tell me, if it could be proved that Solace imagined he was addressing another lady, while he was in reality speaking to Mrs. Crookley—if, I say, it could be proved that he was thus mistaken, and had no intention of annoying you in any way, I suppose you would have no objection to apologize for your insulting act to him, in which case he would, of course, withdraw his challenge, and all might be settled amicably.'

"Well, certainly," the major answered, 'if it could be proved that the young fellow had mistaken my wife for any other lady, which in this dim light is just possible, I suppose I ought to ask his pardon for any offensive gesture;

yet I hardly think he could have made such a mistake.'

"Well, I can not be sure about it," replied Melton; 'only my impression is that he took your wife for another lady, for whom I know he entertains a great admiration. The best plan, however, will be for us to meet at the appointed place at half-past four o'clock, when, if an accommodation is possible, I will arrange it; if not, Mr. Langham and I will act as the friends of Solace; you, I suppose, will bring your own.' So saying, we turned and walked back toward the dancing room; but we had not gone half a dozen yards when Melton went into a fit of quiet laughter, so violent that we were obliged to stand still for a few minutes till he got over it a little. 'Oh, it is too good, Langham! Is it not splendid? Think of that foolish Baby making pretty speeches to that old Hecate, Mrs. Crookley! And then his fighting a duel for love of her *beaux yeux*! Our fellows will die laughing when they hear of it; I tell you what we ought to do. It will be a good thing to give that foolish youth a little fright; it may break him of the habit of indiscriminate flirtation he has allowed himself to contract, and it is sure to give us some fun, when he knows for whose sake he has been risking his precious person under the major's fire, for he is A 1 with pistols. We will not let him know about the mistake until they are on the ground face to face; then imagine how he will look when he finds Mrs. Crookley is the fair cause of strife.'

"I thought the idea good, and readily agreed to work it; but we were near failing in the beginning from the dreadful difficulty we experienced in keeping grave faces while we told the unhappy Baby the hour and place of meeting, with other arrangements, ending by requesting him not to allow people to see anything unusual about him, but to keep up dancing with his customary spirit till the guests separated, which they did about four o'clock. As soon as they were gone we seized on Solace, and dragged him off to the place of meeting."

"We can sit here and smoke a quiet cigar," observed Melton. 'until the time is up.' We have only half an hour to wait; and in the meantime, old fellow, if you have any message to leave for any of your friends, tell me, for though I do not think matters will be as bad as that, still it is the correct thing to do, and we may as well do the proper thing as we are about it."

"Yes," interrupted Solace at this juncture, "and a most heartless fellow I thought you, Melton. You looked so cool and easy over it all, and asked me had I made my will in such a matter of fact manner, that I thought you the most unfeeling monster I had ever met, and longed to be able to proclaim to the regiment what an unnatural ruffian you really were, instead of the kind, good-hearted fellow we had hitherto thought you."

"That will do, Solace," said Langham, waving his hand serenely; "your thoughts were very visible on your face, and I could repeat them all exactly as they passed through your mind if I considered them worth repeating. I only wonder how I ever kept my countenance; I am sure I have injured myself internally in my struggles to keep from laughing outright."

"Time went on. Solace was worked into a white heat by Melton's friendly offers and my instructions and comforting assurances, and I was beginning to think we should have to take the other line, and make light of it, to keep his nerves steady, though, to do him justice, they stood the test wonderfully, when Major Crookley made his appearance."

"Oh, here you are already!" he cried. 'I am glad you are so punctual. We shall get over this little business in a few minutes; and I do not want to be long, as Mrs. Crookley may take it into her head to ask where I have been. I have brought a surgeon as well as my second, you see. I thought it likely one would be wanted.'

"Very well," I answered. 'We had better now measure the ground and place the principals. You are neither of you inclined to apologize, I suppose?'

"No, indeed," said Solace, stiffly; while Major Crookley did not seem to have heard my question, and began chatting to the surgeon with great volubility and ease of manner. Solace stood apart, looking as if he had swallowed a ramrod, and apparently taking not the smallest interest in our proceedings, though I am convinced he was watching out of the corner of his eye the whole time. The Major had brought a very nice pair of pistols, which we determined to use, as they were the only ones to be got, and in a few minutes everything was ready. The principals were placed in their proper positions, and Melton was just about to step up and ask Solace how he could be so fearfully foolish as to run himself into such a scrape for Mrs. Crookley, when a dark figure rushed out from among the bushes coming from the direction of the house, and discovered to our astonished eyes the lady herself."

"This is a pretty way to treat your guests!" she cried, turning on her husband. 'What do you mean by it? Do you think I will allow such performances here? Go back to the house instantly, and do not let me hear of your trying anything of the kind again. Here, give me that pistol before you go; you must have got my keys to take these. Pretty doings, indeed!'

"The Major looked from one to another of us as though imploring protection and pity; then slowly and reluctantly handed the pistol over to his wife, who returned it to its case, and who, as he turned to leave, called out after him: 'Stay a minute, and tell me what this is all about.'

"I only wished to give that young fellow a lesson about interfering with other people's wives. He is the one who was begging flowers from you last evening," said the Major, sulkily."

"Oh, is that all?" answered the lady benignly. 'He did not mean any harm by it; it was only a little gallant speech that meant nothing.'

"All this time Solace had been listening with open-mouthed wonder; now he whispered to Melton, 'You do not mean to say they think I asked her for flowers?'

"Indeed they do," laughed Melton; 'and I much fear you were guilty of it—unknowingly, I believe, but still guilty you were. Tell them who it was you went to meet at the temple, and perhaps she matter may be set right.'

"Thus urged, Solace stepped forward. 'Was it you, Mrs. Crookley, I met at the temple last night? I went there to find your sister Miss Loudon, who told me she would probably be there when our dance came round; and I thought I was addressing her when I begged for flowers. I should never have ventured to make so presumptuous a request to you.'

"You went to meet my sister," replied Mrs. Crookley. 'I knew from what you said you were mistaking me for some one else, though I could not guess whom I was taken for. We will call Amelia, and see why she was not there as she promised, thus causing this stupid mistake. Ali!' she continued, raising her voice. A black servant came out from among the bushes, and approached her. 'Go and call Missee Loudon—I want her; or stay, we will return to the house, but tell her I want to see her.'

"If the Mem Sahib will not be angry, Ali will tell where Missee Loudon gone away to," answered the black, with a cunning look in his dark eyes. 'Missee Loudon she run off with Mister Spot, the young leetle Sahib come so often to see the Mem Sahib. Ali her Missee Loudon say they go off to be married.'

"Ensign Spot, of the 101st Native Infantry!" screamed Mrs. Crookley. 'The ungrateful girl! is that the way she treats me? She will have nothing to live on, as I know. He has not a penny; and she need not expect anything from me, as she has not married to please me. I always intended her to make a good match, and now she has gone and spoiled all my plans. The ungrateful hussy!'

"Melton and I looked at each other, and went into internal convulsions of laughter; while the major sidled up to Solace, who was

looking very glum, and holding out his hand, said:

"Well, it was a mistake, after all, and I am sorry for my part in it, and still more sorry that the girl has gone and made a fool of herself. You will forgive my hastiness, will you not? I really thought you were using me badly, and my temper is unfortunately soon put up. I must go now and see where that foolish couple have got to, as I should be sorry if Amelia got into trouble; but you will come in and take something before you go?"

"We declined this, however, and set off on our way back to A——; and if Solace does not know what it is to be chaffed by this time, I am much mistaken."

"Bravo, Baby?" I cried, when Langham had finished. "You got out of it splendidly, though I think that was more through good luck than good guidance. I hope your next flirtation will not have quite so exciting a termination."

"Oh, I never flirt, I assure you," answered Baby, gravely; "and it's a great shame of all of you to be so eternally accusing me of it."

"No, indeed, you never do flirt, and you never will, until the next time; but take care you do not do it once too often, and find yourself hooked some day before you know where you are. Now, Melton, come up into my room, for I want to have a chat with you."

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERY.

WHEN I brought Melton up to my room, and explained to him the cause of my long absence and its results, his anger exceeded even what I had expected and been prepared for. There came into his face such an evil look, that I could not help thinking how bad the best of us are at times. If Captain Cameron had come before him then I could not have answered for the results; neither reason nor friendship could have restrained him, and I determined to keep him in his room, if possible, till the first burst of his fury should have expended itself. It was then that he told me the affair about the money, saying:

"With such a villain I will keep no faith. I consider myself fully absolved from my promise by what has just passed. Now, Cairnsford, I must write at once to Mr. Meares, and tell him what I have heard. You are ready to corroborate my statements, are you not?"

"Stay," I said; "they will require proofs, and those we must get. He said St. Margaret's was burned, and the books with it. I do not remember hearing anything about it, and I think it would be well for one of us to get leave at once, and start at once for Calcutta, to investigate. I believe he was saying what was not true to mislead his wife; at any rate, we must try and get some proof besides our mere assertions, for though I think they would be sufficient to break off the match as far as the young lady is concerned, the parents might not see it in the same light. As I think Crusty is more obliging to me than to you, perhaps I had better apply for leave, and go on this errand. In the meantime, if you can dissemble, you must do so. Do not let Cameron think you know a word of this; let him imagine that I went away without telling you. If we manage well, he may not start immediately for Calcutta, as I am sure he will do when he knows where I have gone, on purpose to try and destroy any record that may exist. I shall be able to find the proofs before he suspects we are on the scent."

"How can I thank you, Cairnsford?" Melton replied. "You are too good to me, taking all this trouble for one who can do so little for you in return. Do you know that I never thought till now that hearing of such dreadful villainy could make my heart so light? It has given me hope, and I shall live now with more purpose than I have done for months past. If ever I have it in my power to revenge on that man his wickedness to her I will do so, cost what it may, be it soon or late. To him who can wait, vengeance will come."

His tone was vindictive, and a sullen light shone in his eyes as he spoke that showed my friend was not the perfect self-controlled being I had imagined him. However, the time for action had come, and, only waiting to impress on him the necessity of dissimulating before Captain Cameron, I left to seek out the colonel and apply for leave.

It was granted without difficulty. I do not know that I can assert that I was a favorite with the old fellow, but he had a most nineteenth-century veneration for riches, and would always bow down and worship any golden calf that might be set up before him. Now Fortune had favored me in this respect, so I never found any trouble in getting my requests granted by old Armstrong, and this occasion was no exception to the rule.

Having obtained leave, I set about preparations for an early start next morning. At three o'clock in the night or morning, or whatever you like to call it, I set out without having seen Cameron since our parting at Booderabad; I was not even aware whether he had yet returned. It was a horribly long and tiresome journey, and, though I made the best speed I could, took me nearly a week to accomplish. At such times how slowly life seems to move! I felt like one reading an interesting novel, who longs to skip the intermediate pages and arrive at the end of the story. I had an intense curiosity to see how this romance, to which I had suddenly become a spectator, would terminate. I felt as if every little exertion on my part to discover proofs of Cameron's guilt was the turning over of a leaf in the life-story open before me. But it was slow work waiting, even though working; it might take years before the denouement came, and the question was, would my interest then survive; would it not probably have died out ages before; and though Hugh would still be my friend, would not his love and its success have ceased from a too familiar acquaintance with all its details, to be a matter of interest to me? Very likely it would. In the meantime the journey was dull, and I had nothing else to think of; so I thought of that till I worked myself into a perfect fever of impatience, and longed to leap over two or three years of my life, and see how matters would stand then. Life is slow work, unless one is actively busy. In those sultry summer days when we rested under the shade of the banyan-trees, and I listlessly watched the Hindoos cooking their rice, I felt that, with an intolerable overpowering sense of helplessness to make it otherwise. I should, no doubt, have felt it even more but for the myriads of flies of all sorts and species that nearly drove me distracted, and made anything like serious thought, out of the question.

At last I reached Calcutta; but I hope no one expects me to render an account of how I passed my time during the week I spent there, resting from the fatigues of my past journey, and preparing for the one before me. As I had suspected, the story of the fire was a *canard*, artfully founded on fact to mislead his unsuspecting wife. The vestry had been partially burned, but the books were safe, and I not only saw the registry of Captain Cameron's marriage, but got a copy of it for my own and Melton's satisfaction; for the rest, I was even more unwell than I had been up the country, and longed insanely for a whiff of the cool sea-breezes on my native sea-coast, and a glimpse of the green Atlantic breakers as they surge in on the tall gray cliffs of my father-land.

The week I had allowed myself was over at last, and I set out on my return, wondering lazily during those dull hot days of travel whether Hugh would be guided by my advice in this matter, or whether he would act in a headstrong, heedless manner, that would damage him before the world, and give his crafty opponent some loophole through which to creep, and appear before all eyes as a blameless character, whom circumstances, as represented and stirred up by that maniac Melton, had been very much against. It was quite on the cards that this would be the end of the whole business. I was prepared to see myself appear in

rather a ridiculous light; but if such things were to deter me, I should have thought of them at first, not now; and I could only hope Hugh might be more manageable and willing to listen to reason, than when I left.

I did not see him, or, indeed, any one else about the place, when I returned, and of course concluded they were all out at their usual amusements, as it was rather late in the evening, the most favorite time for outing in our station. I went, therefore, at once to the colonel's quarters to report myself, and found him in, looking, as I thought, very grave and busy.

In such a dry old stick as he was that did not much surprise me, but I wished I had come at another time; for though busy, I saw by the way he motioned me to sit down and hustled his papers together that he intended to have a chat.

"This is a very sad business, Cairnsford," he began. "Can you throw any light on it? I suppose not, as you were away. Still, you were his friend."

"I have not the very faintest idea to what you are alluding," I answered, with some curiosity, for, to do him justice, our colonel's manner was really sad.

"To be sure, I did not care much for him," he continued; "but then such a mysterious disappearance. It is very shocking. They say, you know, he must have been devoured by a tiger."

"But who is it, colonel? You know I have only just come back. I have not heard a word about whatever the affair is to which you are alluding."

"What! not heard of Melton's disappearance? How extraordinary! I thought that every one was talking of it."

"So they may be here; but as I have just come off a long journey and have seen no one, I know nothing about it. Might I ask you to tell me all?"

I said this quietly enough, though my heart was beating loudly with suppressed excitement at this extraordinary rumor, so disjointedly told that I could only gather Melton had disappeared somehow, and some people thought a tiger must have carried him off; but I said to myself, as these facts were slowly realized in my bewildered brain, that I knew better, and that if Melton was really gone, it was a tiger in human, not in brute shape that had made away with him. If he did not turn up, and if diligent search could discover the slightest proof my suspicions were correct, I swore to myself a deep but silent oath, while leaning breathlessly across the colonel's table, that I would have vengeance sudden and summary—vengeance for the young life blighted, for the true heart stilled, for the brave blood spilled, for the earnest friendship shattered. Yes, he should never escape me, this skulking ruffian, this midnight assassin; and I vowed a vow before God to deal by him in my hour of power as he had dealt by my friend in his.

The colonel's voice disturbed me.

"You look ill, Cairnsford," he said; "I should not have told you so suddenly, only I thought you must already have heard the sad news. He was a dear friend of yours, I remember; no doubt well worth liking too, though he and I did not pull well together. Well, I am sorry for him. If we can find out the rascally brute that did for him, I will not be behindhand in firing a shot to avenge our old comrade."

Old Crusty, after all, was better than I had thought him; he seemed really moved as he pronounced this quaint and characteristic funeral oration, and I cordially grasped the hand he held toward me. He then told me all the particulars of my poor friend's disappearance.

Just the fifth day after I left, Melton went out early in the morning to sketch, which was with him nothing extraordinary. He did not return at night, which was certainly not a little strange; but no one thought much about it till the end of the second day, when his prolonged absence induced Solace and Langham, with some of the others, to get up a party and go out in search of him. His sketch-block and other traps were found in a remote forest glade, but how he had

left this spot could not be discovered. There were no footprints leading in any direction out of the glade, though the path by which he had entered was visible enough to the keen eyes engaged in the search. Hence some supposed a tiger must have carried him off, though others, combating that supposition, urged that a tiger would have left traces that might have been recognized as easily as those of a man.

It was now two weeks since his disappearance, and no farther light had been thrown upon the matter. I resolved, if my suspicions were correct, that the whole case should soon be cleared up.

On leaving the colonel I immediately sought out Solace, who I knew to be a nice young fellow and sincerely attached to Melton. It was some time before I found him, as he was at the racket-court with Langham, and I hunted in every other place before going there to look for him. They told me everything had been done to discover the truth about Melton's fate, and that after a fortnight's strict search no more was known than when he was first missing. Of course, though satisfied that they had done their best, I could not rest without renewing the investigation myself, trusting that, guided by my suspicions, I should be able to find some clue that would enable me to expose the perpetrator of this dastardly murder; for that there had been a murder, and that Cameron had been implicated in it, I at this time never doubted.

Day by day I examined the glade where the last traces of my friend had been found, and searched the jungle for miles round in hopes of lighting upon signs that had been overlooked in former expeditions; but without avail. My health gave way under distress and anxiety of mind, and I was at length obliged to submit to the doctor's imperative orders, and return to England on sick-leave, having obtained only this one certainty in the matter, that Cameron had for once been wronged by my suspicions, and that he was no more connected with poor Hugh's death than I was. Indeed, I had by this time begun to concur in the general belief that a tiger must have devoured him. The only thing that puzzled me in this supposition was the fact that we had been unable to find any traces of his garments, though we had certainly discovered a tiger's lair some three or four miles off in the jungle, and had avenged our comrade by slaying the inhabitant of it, generally supposed to have been poor Hugh's destroyer. Poor fellow! it was, indeed, a sad fate. Both officers and men regretted him sorely, and remembered when too late what a kind, helpful friend he had been, both to his equals and inferiors. As a mark of the respect and esteem in which he had been held, it was proposed to erect a tablet to his memory in the parish church of Marshampton, his native place, and I was commissioned to see that the order (a subscription had been got up for the tablet among the officers and men) was properly executed during my stay in England. Just before I left, some words that fell from Captain Cameron showed me that notwithstanding our meeting at Booderabad, that gentleman intended to prosecute his designs on Miss Meares; intending for that purpose to get leave, and return to England at the end of the year. I suppose he thought I had believed his assertions that the lady I had rescued was not his wife, and that my friend being now out of the way, I should not consider it worth my while to interfere. In that supposition he was mistaken; knowing what I did about him, it was imperative on me to let the girl's parents understand what kind of man their would-be son-in-law was. Accordingly home I went with a year's sick-leave, and as Cairns Hall, where my mother and sisters resided, was not far from Abbot's Park, one of the places held by Miss Meares during the time the terms of the will remained unsettled, I went over one morning to call on Mr. Meares, and to acquaint him with my discoveries.

He received me alone in the library, and seemed both distressed and shocked at the news I had to communicate. No doubt the thought of the comparative poverty they would be called upon to endure, after their brief taste of wealth

and the pleasures it can purchase, was not agreeable; but he was a brave old man, and in a few minutes rose superior to any regrets he might have felt, and thanked me heartily for what he was pleased to term my very friendly conduct in letting him know the danger that menaced his daughter in connection with that man. "And now," he continued, rising, "it is just luncheon-time; let me persuade you to join the ladies and take something before setting out on your walk home. It is warm to-day, though no doubt after the heat of India you do not feel it so."

Thus Mr. Meares stopped me as I was about to leave, and bringing me into the dining-room, introduced me to his wife, whom I had never before seen, and his daughter, who recollected me perfectly, but, somewhat to my astonishment, made no inquiry after Hugh, as I thought, knowing our friendship, she might have done. Of course it was pleasanter to me not to have so painful a subject touched upon; but while admiring her beautiful features, and clear, deep eyes, I could not help mentally calling her a heartless flirt, wondering whether she would be annoyed that her marriage was broken off, and dislike me as the bearer of the bad tidings. Not that it would matter much to me; doubtless they would soon leave Abbot's Park, and then any neighborly intercourse that my mother might have had with them would cease, unless they remained somewhere near. As I walked slowly home that day, I felt little pity for the downfall of the heiress, though some curiosity as to how she would bear it.

I had a conviction—whence derived I know not—that her proud beautiful head would never quail unworthily before any reverse of fortune.

For a day or two I heard nothing farther about them; then one morning, on my entering the breakfast-room, my mother looked up from a pile of letters before her, and said:

"I hear, Charlie, the Meareses are leaving Abbot's Park. Miss Meares has refused to marry that Captain Cameron, to whom she has been engaged for so long, and therefore, according to the terms, of the will, all the money that was to have been hers in the event of the marriage goes to a number of different charities. I am sorry for them; they were nice people and pleasant neighbors. I think of writing and asking them here until they have settled their plans, and made up their minds what to do next. Have you any objection?"

Of course I said that I had not, and the two girls, Lilla and May, were in ecstasies of delight at the thought of having Miss Meares with them, hoping, no doubt, to make a bosom friend of her, as the manner of some girls is. I did not want to disappoint them, so did not tell them my impression, which was, that Miss Meares would very likely receive all their confidences and sympathize to any amount, but would give none herself in return. Something about her face gave me the idea that, though she had a surface of frankness very taking to strangers, there was beneath it an intensely reserved nature that would never reveal its dearest thoughts and wishes but to one beloved object, and that to the one she loved there would be no reserve, no concealment. The passion of her life would be steady, absorbing, expanding, if rightly placed and worthily returned; intense, secret, and self-consuming, if unrequited or misplaced.

I said nothing, and my mother asked them. I hardly thought they would accept her invitation; but I was mistaken. They did; they agreed to remain with us for a few weeks, while looking for a small place somewhere near, suited to their now limited means. The first night I fancied Miss Meares was cold and distant to me, though friendly enough to my mother and the girls. I thought she brooded over her loss of fortune, yet I felt almost angry with myself for imagining that the sad expression in her glorious eyes was brought there by any such sordid motive. Her singing was exquisite, and I felt that I could forgive any amount of coldness if only I might be permitted to listen to that thrilling voice and watch that noble passionate face unobserved. How is it that sometimes people perfectly soulless and uninteresting in themselves are gifted

with such glorious talents? I almost hated her, as I watched and admired, when I thought that but for the glamor cast around him by that perfect face and angel's voice poor Hugh might have been alive and happy yet.

We breakfasted late at Cairns. My mother and sisters were not early risers; but I often went out those bright spring mornings with my rod to a stream that ran through the place, and which from my earliest years I remembered as being a favorite resort of the speckled trout, so dear to the soul of the angler.

Next morning, after spending an hour or two fishing, I was wending my way home, when, as I approached a stile that I must cross to strike the nearest path to the house, I perceived a figure leaping against the fence with the back turned toward me. It was a woman, simply yet handsomely dressed in a pretty walking costume. After a few minutes' puzzled scrutiny I became aware that it was no other than Miss Meares.

She did not see me at first, and I watched her for a minute as she turned about with an anxious air, as though she had lost her way. I advanced toward her quietly, so that she did not hear me coming; and as I approached I had time to scan the delicate outlines of her face, and I imagined that she looked paler and more thoughtful than usual. When I got near, a branch cracked under my foot; she started, and turned hastily, but without any signs of fear on her fair open brow. Recognizing me, she held out her hand frankly, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Major Cairnsford (I had gained a step lately), "how very fortunate I have met you! I have lost my way, and am afraid I shall be late for breakfast."

"No fear of that, Miss Meares; we are in plenty of time. I can show you a short way back to the house." So saying, we walked on together."

We had not gone far, and while I was still thinking of some remark to make—for, to tell the truth, I both feared and mistrusted this young beauty, and felt silent and uncomfortable in her presence, she on her part being equally abstracted and thoughtful—when suddenly she exclaimed, without any preface or leading up to the subject, "By-the-by, Major Cairnsford, I saw an account of the mysterious disappearance and supposed death of Captain Melton, of your regiment, while you were at A—. Would you tell me all about it? I knew him years ago, and feel interested in his melancholy fate."

She tried to utter the words in a matter-of-fact, unmoved manner, but a glance at her half-averted face showed me that her eyelids trembled and her lips quivered as she spoke. Of course, painful as the subject was, I could not refuse to gratify her request, knowing that Hugh would have wished me to comply with anything she might desire. I felt that in making such a demand she evinced an interest, weak and tardy though it was, in the man who had loved her, and who would have given worlds to have heard even that expression of interest from her lips.

I told her all that I knew about my friend's fate, not concealing my own early suspicions of Captain Cameron, who, I said, flourished, as I well knew, a very bitter dislike to his comrade Melton. She listened in silence till I had finished, and then exclaimed, abruptly:

"You were right, Major Cairnsford, Captain Cameron is in some way implicated in Captain Melton's disappearance. I do not say he has killed him—in fact, I hardly believe that he is dead—but that he has been made away with in some way, by Captain Cameron's agency, I am convinced. It remains for us to find out what has really happened—whether he is still alive, or indeed dead—and whichever be the case, to punish the man who has worked this wickedness."

She looked at me boldly now, with her head up, her cheek flushed, and her deep flashing eyes meeting mine frankly and bravely.

I shook my head, and answered:

"You are mistaken, Miss Meares, and for once wrong Captain Cameron, whom Heaven

knows it is not easy to wrong, for he is as bad a man as the sun ever shone on; but in this, at least, he is innocent. I thought as you do at first, and, guided by the light of my suspicions, I scrutinized his every act, in the endeavor to obtain a clew to my comrade's fate; but I was forced at last, after many a long and weary search, to arrive at what I am convinced is the true conclusion, namely, that poor Hugh was devoured by a tiger, as my brother officers at first supposed."

"I wish I could think with you," she answered in an unconvinced tone. "That Captain Melton is dead must, I fear, be true, that Captain Cameron had no hand in his death I can hardly bring myself to believe. For a long time I struggled against my own convictions to believe Captain Cameron such a man as Captain Melton was—such a man, in fact as I could have wished him to be; but now his baseness has been so fully revealed to me, and I remember so many little things that used to annoy me in him, which tend now to throw a clear light on his character that nothing seems to me too bad to accuse him of. I cannot feel as if I could wrong him by any charge I brought against him."

Thus as we walked homeward we fell into conversation on subjects all more or less connected with that first started. She told me of how they had first met Melton in Ireland; of their poor dwelling and frugal mode of living, to which, however, they soon did not fear to invite him when they found how easily contented and kindly was his nature, just as much at home with them, and as friendly in his intercourse with them as he was with the gay inhabitants of Moortown Castle, where he was also a favorite and a frequent guest. Then she spoke of his great talent, of the pleasant days when he taught her some of the secrets of his art, and praised her aptness as some more than usually happy touch evinced her progress and the success of his lessons. Her voice grew sweet and low, and her cheeks flushed brightly, as she spoke with real feeling (that trust of all eloquence) on this subject, evidently dear to her thoughts. As I watched her I regretted more and more that Hugh had not lived to meet her now, when she dared to own to herself and to show to the world that she loved him. We reached the house at last, and my prejudice against Miss Meares was completely dispelled as I left her at the porch while I went to put away my fishing tackle. My morning had been tolerably successful; I had six fine trout in my basket, the result of my three hours' stroll. It was not bad sport, and it had given me the opportunity of penetrating a little beneath our charming guest's proof-armor of reserve, and had enabled me to find out that a heart beat underneath, closely watched and guarded though that heart might be.

I liked her better after that walk, and as I followed her into the breakfast-room began to think that perhaps my friend had not been so wrong after all when he committed the happiness of his life to her keeping. The Meares stopped with us for two or three weeks, while looking out for a small house in a neighborhood, but at last, not finding anything of the sort was to be had, they determined to move to London, and in one of the suburbs of that busy city make themselves as comfortable as their very limited means would permit.

"And if we find we cannot make both ends meet any other way," said Maud, gently, "I shall try to find some one weak enough to intrust me with the education of the rising generation. I have no doubt I shall make a very skillful governess; and something must be done, I am sure."

I looked at her as she spoke, and saw from her heightened color and sparkling eyes that she was determined to face the world boldly, and fight the battle of life bravely; but alas! poor girl, she little knew what was before her, and I could not think of the trials and humiliations that bright spirit would be called upon to endure without an inward thrill of pain. My mother tried hard to dissuade our visitors from this plan, and to make them remain longer with us, at least until some better expedient might be discovered; but they were intricable, and I at length resolved to speak to Miss Meares myself about it, and try to bring her over to our side, when I felt sure her parents' objection would soon vanish. We had become great friends by this time; she would let me now and then get a glimpse of her kindly, honest, upright heart, and would not scruple to propound her queer unworldly theories to me about any subject on which we might be talking. She met me always as a man might meet a friend, with full frank look and glad smiling welcome; and I—alas! I had begun to think there was nothing better in the world to live for than the soft friendly glance of those deep violet eyes, the gentle welcoming smile on that lovely face, the touch of her soft white hand at morning and evening. I never wondered now, at my friend's infatuation; I only wondered how, guessing, or knowing rather, that her heart was with him, he had not taken her by force of the stronger will and held her against the world. It was what I would do, I told myself, if only I could be sure she felt for me as she had once felt for him; but that affection for my lost friend was the barrier between us, as it was also the connecting link. I knew well I should never have occupied the position I now did in her regard had I not been Hugh's friend; and our longest and most intimate conversations were always on some act of his life, or some trait of his noble and unforgotten character.

Was it not possible, I asked myself, that this pearl above all price that I so ardently desired could be won again? If her love had been but a girlish fancy, perhaps it might; but if the whole of her true woman's heart had been given to Hugh, I feared I had no hope. There are some women who love but once, whose girlish fancy is also the love of their womanhood. I feared, yet glided to believe, that

my peerless Maud was one of these. I could not bear she should leave us, though I dared tell her nothing of this, and met her always with as good an imitation of her own fearless friendship as I could assume. But she must not go away into those squalid London lodgings; on that point I was determined. Rather than that should happen I would conquer my fears, pour all my passionate prayers and longings into her pitying ears, and if it were possible, nay, if it were impossible, win from her a promise that one day at last I should have a right to protect and shelter her from the hardships and cares of the strange world into which she was about to enter.

CHAPTER X.

AND THUS IT CAME TO PASS.

I REMEMBER well the lovely morning late in June when I opened my heart before her who so entirely possessed it; not, as I had intended, with deliberate purpose, aimed and prepared at all points with prayers and entreaties against the denials I dreaded, but in broken, disjointed, vague words, that yet made themselves better felt and understood than those I had so often thought over would probably have done. She was to leave the next day but one, yet I had not spoken, and though intending to speak, could not summon up courage to do so. But accident brought about at last the opportunity for which I waited, and the words that could not be controlled broke from my heart, before I knew they were uttered.

She was out somewhere about the place that morning quite alone; the girls and my mother were all in different parts of the house, and I wandered out to seek her in whose presence my heart delighted. It was a glorious morning. I remember yet the brilliant summer sunlight making golden gleams on the shaded grass under the old lime trees, the sweet scent of hay that floated by upon the breeze, the lazy hum of flies that fell upon the ear as they floated in ceaseless swarms through the scentful lime blossoms; everything seemed in a state of blissful repose, such as the lotus-eaters enjoyed on that dreary shore where it was "always afternoon." She was not in the garden; I looked in vain in every nook for a glimpse of the white dress I knew so well; I would have called, but I dared not utter aloud that dear name; I searched and waited.

I turned at last down toward our little river, that ran flashing and glancing in sunlight and shade through many a mile of the old domain. It was deep, too, though but a small river, and the current in parts dangerously strong; just below the garden it narrowed in between high rocky banks that rose perpendicularly to the height of about thirty feet above the water. The whole stream just there was, at the narrowest part, about fourteen feet across; but the water looked black and dark, and the rocky walls on either side fearfully sharp and jagged.

As I sauntered down to the river just there I hardly expected to see Maud at that spot, but I thought it very probable I should find her farther on, under some old chestnut trees that spread their dark foliage far out over the water. I knew the smooth rocks under their drooping branches were her favorite seat. I found her sooner than I had expected. As I approached the stream, which, though it here ran deep and dark, made only the faintest bubbling noise, the sound of voices struck on my ear, and, gaining the bank, I perceived her on the other side of the river in conversation with a lady, whose back was turned toward me, but whose figure seemed somehow strangely familiar to my eyes.

She was talking rapidly, in a wild, impassioned manner, Maud listening with a half-frightened, half-pitying look in her sweet face, and now and then, I could see, trying to soothe and comfort her excited visitor. They neither of them saw me, and for a minute or two I watched them unobserved; then the unknown, suddenly turning, revealed to my astonished eyes the beautiful features of Mrs. Cameron, now distorted by jealousy and pain, while her fine eyes seemed to gleam with an unnatural light. Though watching them I could not overhear their conversation; nor did I care to do so, for, although surprised at seeing Mrs. Cameron, I thought she could tell Maud nothing she did not already know, or that would render my interference necessary. What passed between them Maud related to me afterward, and, as I think it will tend to make my narrative clearer, I relate it at the time it occurred, as if I had myself been present. Maud had gone out alone that morning, as I said, and was wandering her way toward her favorite seat, which was on that side of the river farthest from the house, and, as it remembered, on the opposite bank to that on which I stood watching them. She had crossed a little rustic bridge a few hundred yards from where she now stood, and had arrived at the Robber's Leap, as the narrow part of the river I have described was called—from some old family tradition, I believe—when a lady, very handsomely attired, though her dress bore evident marks of wear and travel on it, stepped out from among the trees, and advancing toward her, said:

"Am I right in supposing I am addressing Miss Meares?"

"I am Miss Meares, certainly," replied Maud, rather taken by surprise. "But you have the advantage over me, as I cannot remember ever having met you before."

"Neither have you," answered the stranger. "I come from a far land, lady, to beg you to do me a favor, and to save yourself from a life of shame and trouble."

Maud tossed her head with her old proud, impatient grace.

"I do not understand you," she said. "Trouble we must all have in this life—God knows it would

good, if we look at it rightly, if not, for our punishment—but only sin brings shame; and, through God's grace helping me, the stain of disgrace shall never rest on my name through any act of mine."

"Oh lady, beautiful, cold, proud English lady," cried this strange visitor, and Maud fancied her voice and accent had a foreign unfamiliar sound, "have you ever loved? Do you know what it is to have one man enthroned in your heart—his love the sole earthly good you covet, his smile dearer to you than the summer sunlight, the lingering tones of his voice pleasanter to your ear than the most enchanting music? Do you know what it is to dream of him by night and watch for his step by day—to feel, the morning his presence is not with you, blacker and lonelier than the gloom of the wild moonson? Have you loved like this, lady, and then felt that another eye, brighter perhaps than yours, a smile more sparkling and mirthful, was drawing the heart you loved, the one treasure you craved for, from you? Do you know what it is to suffer thus?"

"Poor thing," Maud answered, tenderly, "it is indeed a fearful fate that you describe. The man who could treat you thus is not worthy of you. Give your love only to the noble and true, and it will never be thrown back as a worthless gift into your bosom. A true heart knows always the value of a true love, and even when it cannot return it, it sees the worth of the prize and is grateful. If you, poor soul, have been deceived by the tinsel glitter of a mock affection, your fate is indeed sad; but what can I do to help you? For empty pity is worthless, and you must have desired something from me if you came so far to see me."

"But you love him," the woman cried, angrily, "and he is not noble and true, as you fancy. It is he who has loved me who now desires to marry you: he is deceiving you, for I am his wife—his lawful wife, do you hear? He destroyed my certificate, or I would show it to you. Oh lady, dear lady, for your sake, for mine, have nothing to say to him!"

Maud guessed now who her visitor was, and to whom she alluded, and saw that the poor creature was almost if not quite, crazed, and she answered, gently.

"I know you are his wife, if you refer to Captain Cameron; and I promise you solemnly on my word as a lady to have nothing more to do with him. But will you not tell me how you came here?" I thought you were in India."

"I could not rest in India," she replied. "I knew that he intended coming to England early in the year to marry you—he told me—so I thought I would seek you out, and if you were kind and wise and good, as they say English girls are, I would tell you my story, and get you to take pity on me. I sold all I had to sell, and raised money in different ways, till I got enough to pay my passage over. He had got tired of coming to see me—he said I bored him—so I had heard nothing from or of him for a long time, and left without his knowledge. And now I have gained my point; you have heard my story and pitied me; but what am I the better for? He will never love me again, and it would be better I was sleeping quietly beneath that dark water. And so I will." Here she made a step forward; then she paused suddenly. "If I do, your promise will not hold, and he will marry you. No, you must go too; then we shall rest together, and I shall be happy. Come, lady, come! It looks dark and cold; but none can disturb us there, and our sleep will be sweet."

She seized Maud's hand as she spoke, and drew her toward the edge. For one instant her natural impulse was to struggle, and she tried to wrest herself away; but the dangerous fire began to glitter in the maniac's eyes, and she felt that her strength was no match for the frenzied force of the madwoman.

"Wait a minute," she said, calmly, while every pulse beat wildly. "I can not go into the water with my boots on; I dislike the feeling of wet leather so much. You must allow me to sit down and unlace them first; and I should advise you to do the same, that then we may go alike."

She had not seen me on the other side as she made this excuse to gain time; it was only with the faint hope the maniac might accede to her request, and help might arrive before she had finished, that she suggested it.

The madwoman happily appeared to approve the proposal, for she sat down also, and prepared to remove her boots.

In the meantime I, on the opposite side, had been alarmed by the strangeness of their actions, and I had at last partly guessed the woman's intention. Their last act puzzled me; still there was no time to be lost. The bridge was some way off; was it possible to leap the river? In that part it was but fourteen feet or so. At its narrowest a good leaper could do it easily, and in my young days I had been accounted one of the best; besides, tradition told me it had been done before. At any rate the case was one of life or death; I must try. The place at which the leap was most practicable was about a hundred yards from where the two ladies were. Mrs. Cameron had already risen to her feet, and was holding out her hand to Maud, who lingered over the unlacing of her dainty Balmorals. I took this in at a glance as I went back a few yards for a run. As I came down to the leap Mrs. Cameron perceived me, and cried, wildly:

"He shall not save you! Come! You shall not live to be happy with Edward when I am gone!" Seizing Maud—who, seeing me, remained seated, and clung with the strength of despair to the herbage around—she dragged her toward the edge.

There was not much time to spare. As I leaped the river and landed safely on their side, Maud was but three yards from the overhanging cliff; but she

had caught hold of a small sapling with one hand, and held for her life. At my best speed I ran toward them. Never even in my school-days had I got over the ground so fast; but Maud's strength had failed her, and she was already on the edge. One spring more, and I grasped her dress as the maniac, pulling her fiercely forward, sprang off the bank into the chasm below. Maud was carried over the edge by that last wild effort, but the dress held firm for an instant, though it seemed to give in every direction; the next minute I had my arm round her, and drew her onto the bank, scarcely looking in my agony at the rings of light floating wide over the water on the spot where the wretched madwoman had sunk.

As soon as I had placed Maud in safety I returned again to the water. A little way down the river I saw for an instant the poor woman's light dress floating, but before I could get to the spot it had sunk again. Hastily I threw off my coat and plunged in, but had scarcely done so when she rose a little way further down. I followed, but again she sank out of my sight, though I dived again and again, and spent a long time in search of the body, it was in vain, and I was at last compelled to desist until I could send men with drags to continue the search. I then returned to where I had left Maud, and found her quite unconscious. She had borne up bravely while the danger lasted, but the sudden revulsion of feeling on finding herself safe had overpowered her. I carried her to the house, and leaving her in charge of my mother, hurried back with the necessary men and implements to continue the search. After many hours' fruitless anxiety and toil darkness forced us to leave off; and though we continued for several days seeking the body it was never found. We supposed the current had carried it down to the Severn, and that in the depths of that river it had been lost beyond all hope of recovery.

This was the fate of the lovely and unfortunate woman who had been so foolishly trustful as to repose confidence in the faith and love of such a man as Captain Cameron. I, who had seen her in her beauty and confiding affection, felt deep pity for her sad end, and it only added one more motive to the many that actuated me in my hatred to Captain Cameron.

When I returned to the house that evening, Maud was alone in the library. On seeing me she came frankly toward me, saying:

"Major Cairnsford, I can never thank you as I ought for having saved me from that unhappy woman. I owe you my life, and I hope you may yet find me ungrateful. How can I show you my gratitude—words are so feeble?"

"If you really feel that I have done you a service, you can do me a great favor by staying longer with us," I answered, feeling, as I took her hand and gazed down on her sweet, earnest face, that the moment was at last come, and that I should never have a better opportunity of pleading my case than at that moment.

"If you really wish it," she replied, "I will ask mamma to stay; but I am afraid you will have more than enough of us. We have already been here so long, you will repent ever having asked us to the house."

She said this gayly, and turned, laughing, to her work that she had laid on the sofa; but I caught her hands and drew her toward me, saying:

"But I want you to live here always as the mistress;" then, seeing her face flush as she tried to draw herself away, I continued: "O, Maud, have you not seen that I love you? You will not refuse me. I have waited so patiently; but now I must speak. I have been too near losing you to-day to restrain myself any longer."

"Major Cairnsford," she replied, "I am so very, very sorry. I cannot, indeed I cannot, do this for you, though I feel I owe my life to you. Then she continued, with a burst of passionate feeling, "Can you not feel, can you not understand, why I will not marry you? Esteem and honor you as a true friend I do, and ever shall do, but love you I cannot, and you ought not, must not, ask it of me."

"Alas!" I answered, "I feel only too keenly that love such as I give is not yours now to bestow on me; but they say love begets love, and mine is so true, so faithful, that I know some day I shall have yours in return. With that hope I will be content if you will give yourself to me, trusting one who knows the state of your heart, yet longs only for you. I shall have no fear of the result. You shall never, while I live, repent the day when you yielded to my entreaties."

"Impossible," she said again, trying to release herself. "I cannot marry without love, and that is dead in me forever. Leave me, I entreat you, Major Cairnsford. You cannot think how it grieves me to deny you anything, but this cannot be."

But I was half mad with despair, and held her hands as she tried to withdraw them.

"I will not give you up," I cried. "I have lived a solitary life from my youth, and now when the cup of happiness seemed about to be presented to me, is it to be dashed from my lips? Is there no way in which I can move you, nothing that can induce you to alter your determination?"

"Nothing, Major Cairnsford," she answered, rather haughtily, "and I must insist on your leaving me. You are not acting like yourself, and are annoying and paining me more than I ever thought you would do."

"Then go," I cried, releasing her hand and stepping from her. "Go, since you are so cold-hearted that all my passionate prayers and pleadings cannot persuade you to reward the man who you yourself assert has saved your life."

It was a mean speech, and I felt it to be so at the

time, but despair forced it from me, in the vague hope that it might induce her to reconsider her resolution. She stopped, looked at me fixedly for a minute, and then answered:

"If you claim my life as due to you because saved by you, I give it, having no right to withhold it; only I did not know you sought it on those terms."

At that moment she despised me. I heard it in her tone, but I was like a shipwrecked mariner, perishing from thirst, who drinks of the salt-water rolling around him, and dies mad from the fatal draught. I leaned breathlessly forward.

"That way or any way," I cried; "I have your promise. You will love me in time, my own one, if devotion like mine can gain affection, as people say it can."

She shrank a little from me as I drew her toward me, and said, faintly:

"Only give me a little time. It is so sudden, and I was unprepared. You will give me a year, will you not? Surely, you will not ask me to marry you for a year?" She drew back a little from me as she said this, and pressed her trembling hand to her forehead, saying, as if to herself, "His friend! Have you forgotten so soon? I can never forget."

There was intense pain in her tone, reproach to me who dared utter words of love to her; reproach to herself, if she had in any way, by word or deed, encouraged my infatuation. But I was blind and mad, and cried, bitterly:

"Oh, love, let the dead bury their dead! We are young and strong, and have years of life before us. Shall we pass them in lonely misery because death has carried off the best and noblest? My love is as true and earnest as his was, though I can never be loved as he; yet what I desire, what I pray for, is not the love he won, and might had he lived, have worn so proudly. No; I crave only what remains, the last faint embers of a fire too sacred to burn afresh on another shrine. The year you ask; I should be heartless indeed to refuse; till then I will wait in patient hope, having faith that my love will win yours at last."

And so it was settled. I knew by the tone of her voice that she hoped long ere the year had passed I would have forgotten her; but I felt that, even had my love been less deep than it was, such a woman, once known, could never be forgotten. She was so different from the girls one meets generally in society—so gay, yet so tender, so fearless, yet so gentle, so careless of herself, so true to others. I said nothing of this to her, but urged her to remain with her parents at Cairns till I should again see her; for I had made up my mind at once to return for that weary year to my regiment in India, to try among its wildest scenery to pass away the time that appeared endless to my longing heart.

But here also my persuasions were of little avail. One promise only could I exact from Maud; it was that she and her parents should remain a month longer with my mother and sisters before launching themselves upon the dismal ocean of London.

A day or two after this I left home again, with a sad heart, but a bright hope before me. After all, what was a year? But a short time indeed to those who hope—an eternity to those for whom hope is dead, or in whom fear reigns in its stead. And I had no fear. I knew that, next to the dead, I possessed my darling's esteem, and that none could displace me. What cause had I then, to be sad? I asked myself, as we bounded merrily over the sparkling wavelets of the summer sea. I was a lucky fellow, after all. Only for this year, this hateful year! But I would go up to the hills, and while it away as best I might, hunting big game there, whose skins would furnish trophies I might proudly lay at my bright love's feet on my return. So I built castles in the air, watching the curling smoke of my cigar through those golden days, while we sped onward toward Alexandria.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE HILLS.

Our passage out to Alexandria was stormy a good part of the way, and we were a little behind time. Most of the passengers, I fancy, were glad when they heard the confused Babel of sounds that welcomes the arrival of the steamers in that ancient and dirty town. As for me, I cared little. It mattered nothing where I spent my year of probation; discomfort annoyed me very slightly when I could think of my love's fair sweet face and sunny hair, and comfort had few charms when I reflected how many weary months lay between me and happiness. One slight chill my bright dreams did receive, it is true, though it affected me little at the time—in fact, only afforded me a faint and half contemptuous sensation of amusement.

We were doing the Pyramids, as is the custom of travelers in this land. I went along with others. I had seen them before, but to avoid singularity went in for them a second time. When there I roamed away from my party, and occupied myself picturing what Maud (so I called her in my thoughts with consciousness of right) might be doing in the old house at Cairns. I was sitting on a block of stone lying at some little distance from the Great Pyramid on the golden sand of the desert. I had selected this position as commanding a good view collectively of those monuments of man's skill and patience, and mused, as I have said, while smoking and gazing absently on the wondrous scene. Suddenly there arose before me, I know not how, an old withered hag, such an object as is never seen out of an Arab village, and that makes one wonder if it could ever have been young, graceful, and fawn-like as the maidens one sees moving about the same encampment with water-jugs on their heads and soft gazelle-like eyes.

"You are happy now, noble Sir," she croaked in her hoarse guttural Arabic; "happy as a dream.

But joy is like dew: it fades before the morning. Shall I tell your excellency's fortune?"

The sound of her words had a mournful ring in them that jarred on my golden visions. I shook myself impatiently.

"There," I said, throwing her a few piasters; "I know my fortune. You could tell me no better. Leave me now."

She gathered the coins up eagerly enough, but answered:

"If I tell you your fortune now, noble Sir, it may save you many a bitter hour afterward. The bright morning sun does not always betoken a glorious mid-day, and many a fair rose-bud is cankered ere it bloom."

"What is it you want with me?" I answered. "I have given you money. Cannot you leave me?"

"The money is very welcome," she replied, "and the Arab woman does not refuse it; but because your face is fair and your hand open, she would tell you a little of what lies behind the veil of the future, that when the hour comes the blow may be less overwhelming."

"Say on, then, good woman," I replied carelessly, feeling that it was quite hopeless to try and get rid of her while she thought she had anything to communicate. "Not that I believe in the fortune you tell me," I added, "for mine is clear and open, one that those who run may read, but because you seem to wish it, I allow you."

"Yes, yes," she replied, "your future indeed seems to lie before you clear and open—an ancient name, a princely fortune, a fair wife who does not yet love you best of all, but may, and most likely will, do so when love has time to beget love. All that you have before you now, and you think it will only grow brighter with years; but the old Arab woman sees more. She sees a miserable slave toiling in a far-distant country; he has been straight and tall as you, but in face far fairer—such a face as women love to look on. Toil and pain and grief have bent his stalwart form and lined his broad open brow, but yet he shall step between you and happiness, and mar your fortunes. Be wise, be warned in time. Return to your own country and watch over your love."

She turned to go, but I, half amused, half frightened as I knew not what vague danger her words seemed to point to, called on her to stop.

"Tell me, where is he, and who is he, this slave of whom you speak? My race are not wont to fear slaves."

"True," she answered without looking back, and gliding away more nimbly than I could have believed possible—"true; yet they may fear this one, for he is one who will return from the dead."

As she uttered the last word she disappeared suddenly behind a rocky boulder, and when I rose to look for her, excited even out of my calm laziness by her mystic and ominous words, she was gone. Nowhere could I find her; only on the sultry desert air the words seemed to hang, pervading every sight and sound, "he will return from the dead."

For a minute I stood stupefied; then the ludicrous aspect of the situation struck me, and I laughed as I said to myself, "How all our fellows would laugh if they heard this old hag's prophecy! Thank Heaven our women are not like these degraded Easterns, and good looks do not always carry the day even among the most ordinary of them." I turned off to rejoin our party; but on the way back, as we cantered along on our little nimble donkeys, I could hardly refrain from a hearty laugh, angry though I really felt, when I thought how wonderfully the old witch had mistaken the nature and manners of our Northern clime. Nothing remarkable occurred during the rest of our way out, and in due course of time I arrived at A—

Our fellows were astonished to see me back again so soon; but I was glad to see that Cameron had lost ground instead of gaining it during my absence; now hardly any of our best set would speak to him. To make matters worse for him, the colonel, as soon as he heard that all chance of Cameron's marrying the heiress was at an end, began to perceive his mean, sneaky ways, to be less liberal of leave and more of hard work, so that altogether the man's life had altered for the worse.

He scowled savagely at me the first time we met, and said:

"I hope you are satisfied with the mischief you have done me with your tales; at any rate, I am glad of one thing—you have not got the reward you hoped. The heiress is no heiress now, and you cannot profit by the ill you have done. I dare say, for the matter of that, she would be glad enough to have you, but it would not suit your book now."

"I should advise you, Captain Cameron, to leave Miss Meares's name alone, either in connection with me or with any one else. You may as well take this advice in a friendly spirit and be guided by it, as otherwise I shall get you kicked out of the regiment in a way you will not like. I know a little more about you than the other fellows, and caution you for your good."

Cameron literally glared at me for a minute or two, then thinking discretion the better part of valor, turned on his heel and walked off.

"Take care you do not get a knife in your back some dark night, Cairnsford," said Solace, looking up from his paper; "that fellow looks as if he would do for you."

"Pooh!" I answered. "I do not think he has daring enough to put a fellow out of the way; he is too great a coward, and dreads being found out. Eyetheby, didn't you tell me Eames was selling out? Who is looking for the step? Will it do you any good?"

Certainly the climate did not agree with me, for I had not been five months back at A— before the

doctors found it necessary to order me a complete change of air. They wished me to return home; but that I had determined not to do till my term of probation had expired, and therefore adopted the other alternative they prescribed, which was to go up to the hills, far up into a really cool climate, and there pass my time until I found my health re-established. This plan suited me well enough. I was desirous of going after big game among the hills, and determined to strike out quite a new line of my own in the wildest and least known part of the Himalayas. My preparations did not take long to make; I did not wish to have too much roughing, so took some natives to carry ammunition, tent and baggage, with a few other little luxuries I did not care to be without; and last, but not least, I brought with me my trusty soldier-servant, Adams, a man who had been in my service almost ever since I had joined, and who was not only active and enterprising, but understood the ways of the natives much better than is at all usual among that class of men.

I am not going to give a detailed account of all my ramblings; indeed, I think far too much space is already occupied by my personal adventures; but it would be almost impossible to relate events, so as to give a correct idea of them, without a strong admixture of unavoidable egotism.

Day by day we penetrated further into the mountains, and our success in hunting was very fair—one or two splendid bear-skins still attest our luck; but our trophies would doubtless have been far more numerous but for the incident I am about to relate.

One evening we found ourselves near a large and populous village—town I suppose I ought to call it—inhabited by a people who seemed scarcely to understand my men's dialect, and who evidently had seen few white people before. My men declared that they appeared to have heard very little about our victorious English nation, and did not seem to feel the awe they should have done at beholding representatives of so powerful an empire.

Adams did not think it prudent to remain near them; they looked with such covetous eyes on our arms and implements, of which, however they did not know the power or the use; so that I felt safe in the pleasant conviction that the discharge of my revolver would put to flight an army of them. As it was not convenient to go farther that night, I camped in a pleasant valley outside the town, and sent a message to their chief or head man that I would pay him a visit next morning. He appeared inclined to be friendly, and responded to this by sending me a goat and a bag of rice, which furnished a good supper to my whole party—rather a happy circumstance, as we had but little game with us that night, and would otherwise have been on short commons.

Next morning I was astir early, and by way of passing the time till ten o'clock, when the great man held his levee, I determined to stroll through the town, and see what kind of a place it was, and how the inhabitants lived. I found the houses well and strongly built—I suppose on account of the cold at night, which is often very intense—but the streets were no exception to the general rule in Oriental towns and were chiefly remarkable for the filthy state in which they were kept. The most noteworthy thing about the place seemed to be a large building that was being erected on a small hill just outside the town. I went toward it, more from want of something to do than from any particular curiosity, as I supposed it to be a palace for their chief or a temple for some god. There were gangs of slaves working at it, chained together by long heavy iron chains. The poor fellows seemed to find it hard work, toiling under the hot sun, weighed down with such ponderous manacles. I stopped and watched them with some pity, they were so bent, so thin, so wretched-looking. I scanned one face after another, and certainly their look was evil enough; but how could it be otherwise, leading such a life, with no whisper of hope or word of encouragement ever falling on the ear? The overseer or task-master, a big brutal-looking fellow, strolled from one gang to another, constantly bringing down his heavy whip with sounding lash on the shoulders of some offender, more, it seemed to me, for his own brutal pleasure than because punishment was at all called for. My eye traveled slowly down the gang before me, as they one by one glanced up at the strange figure before them. At length it reached the last man in the line, and a puzzled feeling came over me as to where I had seen a face like that of the slave before me. He was working away steadily, and I looked and wondered for a second or two before I remarked, with a curious sense of bewilderment, that, unlike all the rest of the gang, he was a white man. Yes, there could be no doubt about it, he belonged to my own race; perhaps it was that total difference in character of expression and feature that distinguishes our race from others that had made me at first imagine I had seen before that thin sad face, deeply lined by suffering and toil, and half hidden by wild curling locks and long flowing beard. Just as I had made this discovery and had come to this conclusion, the man next him, who had been looking at me with some interest, touched his arm and directed his attention toward me by a word or two uttered in a low voice. The white slave turned his head with a quiet, graceful movement that awoke a sort of vague remembrance in my mind, and raised his eyes toward me. For a moment we gazed at each other in silence; then, with a kind of wail, the words broke from his lips:

"Cairnsford! O, heavens, do you not know me?"

"Hugh! Is it possible? You here!" was all I could utter, as I sprang toward him, and grasped his trembling toil-worn hands in mine.

The overseer was on the other side of the building, so we were safe from his observation; and Hugh leaned his head on my shoulder and sobbed, the ag-

onizing convulsive sobs of intense emotion. Pain and joy, too powerful, too exquisite almost for mortal frame to bear, struggled in his breast.

"I had lost all hope—I was like one dead," he murmured when he had recovered voice to speak. "But you will save me now? You will not leave me again?" he asked with piteous entreaty.

"Surely not, old friend and comrade, my more than brother. This is the happiest day of my life, as I have found you; and I will never leave you again till you are safe and free as I am now."

"Yes; but you must leave," he answered, pushing me from him hurriedly. "Do not let the overseer see us together, or he may persuade the chief not to let you have me. When the hour of audience comes, go to the chief and ask to buy me. Do not be deterred by any difficulties—only secure my freedom. But go now; do not let us be seen together; it may ruin all."

So saying he turned again to his work, and as the overseer rounded the corner of the building and appeared in sight, I was already a few paces off, walking quietly away. How my heart danced as I bent my steps toward a shady grove of trees near our little encampment! Hugh was not dead; he lived, and would soon be at liberty, and through my means. O, it was joyful! I seemed to tread on air, and thought with rapture of the welcome the poor old fellow would get at A—when he returned, and how we would all try to efface from his mind recollection of that terrible captivity. Then he must come home to see his friends in England, and get set up, after all the hardships he had passed through in such a climate. I would manage that for him; I should be going home, too, to Maud—Here my thoughts stopped; my heart seemed to stand still, and the hills around me appeared to reel as the truth flashed on me. This Hugh whom I had loved, whom I had saved, or was about to save, from a living grave, was Maud's lover; with his return my hopes were over. No more watching betwixt hope and fear for a half-tender, half-merry glance; no more wandering in the summer woods; no more passionate love-prayers to lips that, while not consenting, did not wholly refuse. Gone, all gone. The light had passed away from the hillside, the glory from the golden morning; love's dream had been dreamed, and had vanished like the sun in a stormy sunset. But not yet; surely not yet. "I am not bound," I cried, "to shipwreck my own life. What is this man to me that I should give up more than life itself for him? If he wishes to be free why does he not escape, as thousands have done before him? None know that he is here. Adams was not with me; he is still packing up the tent. Come, I will set off at once; none will be the wiser. Every man for himself must be the motto of this world, and once away from this place I shall again breathe freely."

I half rose from the bank on which I had fallen in my first agony when the dreadful truth broke on me; but before I made a step forward a voice within me seemed to say:

"O false friend, can you leave the man you love, or say you love, to die a lingering, miserable death, that you may secure your own happiness? Grant that you lose your love, what is your loss to him, who is dragging on his wretched existence, lost to love and liberty—everything that makes life endurable gone forever? Have you no pity, that you can leave him thus?"

"But I love her, I love her," I half murmured, in answer to my own thoughts. "The trial is too bitter. Who could pass through it?"

"Would he act thus were he in your place?" the same inward voice repeated—"he, the upright and true-hearted. Would he let his own selfish feelings condemn his friend to such fate, or even his worst enemy?"

"It is true, too true," I groaned in anguish. "Must I save him in spite of myself? But O, why did I come here? What evil spirit drove me into these wilds to make such a discovery? O Hugh, O my love, can I be true to you both, and to myself also? I cannot; it is impossible. Then, God helping me, I will be true to you, let me suffer as I may." For a minute or two, as I paced to and fro, I thought I would do and bear all things; then again my strength failed me, and I said: "If the chief sends for me before I can get off I will do my best for his release; but if I find everything ready I will leave at once."

So I resolved with myself as I rose and turned toward my tent. There I found the faithful Adams had prepared my breakfast, not thinking I would leave before the chief's hour of audience. I could not touch it, and told him to get ready for starting with the utmost haste, even while in my heart I loathed myself for the course I was taking. As I walked up and down under the blazing sun, waiting for Adams to complete his preparations, I lamented over what had befallen me. I thought in that dark hour only of myself and of my love who was also his, and who, I almost vowed in my wild despair, should never again behold him. But something—shame, I think—when I thought of his true friendship, withheld me from this sin; still my whole soul rebelled against my fate, and at last the tempter that had tempted me to abandon my friend took another and more specious form, while he urged me never to give up my love without a struggle.

"It would be unmanly, cowardly, feeble-spirited," he whispered. "Rather bind your friend whose life you have saved, and who therefore owes you everything—bind him by a solemn oath never to go near her or to see her more. Tell him you have her promise, and that the happiness of your life depends on your obtaining her; he would rather die a thousand deaths than, after such a confidence, come between you and her. Let him remain in India when you go home; if she hears he is alive, she will naturally conclude he has forgotten her. She will

contrast his fickleness with your constancy, and the result will be certain. The love once his will revert to you; and if in after life they ever cross each other's paths, you may look calmly on their meeting, for her heart will be yours, and he, bound by his promise, will avoid her presence, so that she will never know by what means your happiness was secured."

I should have spurned these thoughts from me with loathing, but I was too weak, and still brooded over them while waiting, when a messenger came from the chief, saying he would see me now. It was a full hour before his usual time for giving audience; but his eagerness to see the stranger had, I suppose, made him deviate from his custom. I never troubled myself about his reasons, however, but followed the messenger mechanically, thinking bitterly, "fate is indeed against me; I cannot now get off without seeing the chief, and I must ask for this man's release, as I decided to do, if I could not get away in time."

Yes, I had become so lost to all good feelings that I mentally called him "that man," and for a minute almost hated him. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, I remembered that he was my own and only friend; dearer to me, as I had often felt, than any brother could have been. As I thought of all the years we had passed together, and the affection we had felt for each other, I shook off the tempter boldly, and determined that no danger or difficulty, no selfish hopes or fears, should ever cause me to desert my friend. At length I found myself before the great man, but indeed I remember little of what passed, only that I presented my small offerings, wherewith I hoped to propitiate his favor. They were graciously accepted, and I then asked to purchase a slave, which request, though it evidently surprised him not a little, was also granted; and by the middle of the afternoon my friend was restored to me, my adieux were spoken to the dark-skinned chief, and we were wending our way merrily homeward.

Merrily, I said: what a mockery is in that word! If merriment lies in a throbbing brain, in a forced laugh, and a breaking heart, then, indeed I was merry. As to my companion, perhaps he was so truly, but I doubt it; all happiness has its alloy, and his was disturbed by doubts and fears as to what might have happened in his absence.

I soon told him everything except the one thing that concerned him and myself most nearly, though still the course I had determined to pursue gathered shape and substance in my brain. Again and again I was on the point of telling him my position, and exacting his promise, and every time, before the words escaped my lips, I checked them, thinking, "There is plenty of time, and I cannot damp his joy so soon. I will tell him another day."

"What a good fellow you are, Charlie!" said my friend, after I had told him all. As I thought of the treachery I meditated, and heard those trusting words, uttered in the old frank voice, I felt the blood rush to my face for very shame. He thought me so good because I had saved Maud from Cameron. What would he say if he knew I had saved her for myself, and that, too, knowing she loved him still?

At that moment I thought myself the most contemptible of created things, and as he laid his poor worn hand gently on my arm, saying: "What is the matter with you? you look ill," I felt that I had indeed sunk low, to think of wronging one so tender and trusting.

"It is nothing," I murmured; "I feel a little worn out by excitement, that is all. Do not speak to me for a little, and it will pass off." Then, as we rode on in silence, side by side, I made a vow that, God helping me, I would be as true to him as my heart told me he would have been to me had our positions been altered. I felt better once this resolution was taken; before, I had feared to meet his eye, I had dreaded the touch of his honest hand; now, I could look at him fearlessly, and loved him even better than of old, for my friendship had been tried by suffering, and I humbly hoped it would be seen to bear the test. Not but that I had many a fierce struggle to pass through, and many times my resolution wavered as I thought of the love I might have won, and my heart would grow sick and faint as I pictured the long years I was doomed to pass, a lonely, disappointed man; for I felt that this passion was one not to be uprooted or lived down, as the more transient affections of my youth had been; it was the last and deepest love my heart could know, and I shrank with natural repugnance from the dreary prospect before me. And then Hugh. Poor fellow! he, knowing nothing but that his love was safe and unwon, could do little but talk of her and his prospects; for she was poor now, as poor as he was, and that seemed somehow to afford him unmitigated satisfaction; though why the prospect of being able to starve along with her, instead of living in luxury together, should be specially delightful, I know not. In this way we traveled back to A—, and I forced myself to seem happy, and to lend a sympathetic ear to all Melton's day-dreams. Then, hardest task of all, I had to comfort and reassure him, when the painful conviction would overwhelm him that the Melton Maud Meares had loved was young, active, tall, and handsome, very different from the bent, brown, enfeebled man who now rode beside me. That he would regain much, almost all, indeed, of his former good looks in time I truly believed; but I knew, as well as he, that eighteen months of privation, toil, and misery had left their mark on him in characters that would never be effaced; that there were wrinkles on his brow no soft white fingers could ever smooth away, and shadows in his deep sad eyes no light of merry laughter could ever chase out of their depths.

At A— he felt the change trouble had wrought in

him keenly when he found that even those of his comrades who had loved him best seemed to find some difficulty in recognizing him, and the first minute we were again alone together he turned to me with a strange fear in his questioning eyes that was piteous to see.

"Tell me, Charlie," he asked, "do you think she will recognize me, changed as I am?" under this question I saw there lurked another, which he dared not put in words. "Will she still love this broken-down and altered man—unaltered in heart it is true, but in all else how sadly changed!"

A great pity for him rose in my heart as I thought what would be his fate if she should find the change too great, and refuse to see in the toil-worn wanderer her old love. But while I seemed to see this hanging over him as a dark possibility, my knowledge of Maud's character gave me confidence to say:

"Do not be afraid, old friend; your love is worthy of you, and will think the same of you now as she did when your life was undimmed by care and sorrow, and your looks unchanged by toil and suffering."

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF ALL.

At A—some good news greeted us; Solace had received a letter from home, in which it was mentioned that Mr. Upton, Hugh's rich old uncle, had died, and had left all his vast property to his nephew, if he should ever be found. The old man was of opinion that as no actual proofs of his death had been discovered, he might still be alive; but if he did not turn up after a term of ten years, then, and in that case, it should revert to another branch of the family, distant cousins of Hugh's whom he had never met.

Here at A—Hugh confided to Solace, Langham, Templeton, myself, and some others, all he knew about his captivity and its cause.

He had been surrounded, while out sketching, by a party of natives, seized, and carried into the hills. He knew the dialect of the people here at A—very well, but this patois puzzled him; he made out enough, however, to ascertain that some one of his brother officers had paid one of the chiefs a large sum of money to make away with him. This chief prudently reflected that he might realize still more money by selling him as a slave than if he killed him, and the man for whom he undertook the business would never be the wiser. Melton was, therefore, sent deeper and deeper among the hills, and finally sold to the tribe with which I had found him. This in brief was his story. There was but one man in the regiment who bore him enmity or had reason to wish him out of the way; there could be little doubt as to the instigator of this cowardly crime; but we had no proofs, and after much debate determined on laying the case before the colonel, and urging him to insist on Cameron's answering the questions and accusations we brought against him. The colonel, who had long been tired of his quondam pet, took the matter up warmly, and sent for Captain Cameron at once.

I triumphed inwardly, and thought, "Our day of power is come: we will at least be avenged by seeing this wretch humiliated and kicked out of the regiment as he deserves. Revenge is sweet certainly, and he is undeserving of pity." Nevertheless, when Cameron first entered the room, and saw the stern, accusing faces gathered round him, he grew pale to his lips, and seemed for a minute as though he would have fallen. At that moment, if he had shown signs of repentance, I could have felt it in my heart to forget all but his cruel treatment of my friend, who looked more kindly on him than any of us, and would have handed him a chair. But recovering his strength and his usual cynical, sneering smile with an evident effort, he interrupted the colonel as he was about to speak, saying:

"Never mind the chair, Melton; I prefer standing. And you, colonel, need not trouble yourself to speak. I can see pretty clearly by the faces of these gentlemen that some dreadful charges have been brought against me, and as slander against one's self is peculiarly disagreeable, I decline hearing it. Do not think for a minute, my dear sir, I acknowledge the truth of those charges; but it is hardly worth the trouble of denying them when every one around me believes them true, so I shall dispense with that ceremony. And now I have only to tell you that, finding the air of this place disagrees with me, and the society not so agreeable as I could wish, I have determined on selling out, and will send in my papers at once. You cannot prove your charges, and will therefore, I suppose, allow me to sell out quietly. I do not think I have anything farther to say that would be agreeable to you to hear, so I had better wish you good-morning;" and with a sneer on his lips Cameron left the room.

"A precious scoundrel we have got rid of," muttered the colonel, as the door closed on him. "I do not envy his future associates."

As this is the last time Cameron comes across the thread of the story, I may be permitted to mention that when I last saw him he was acting as croupier to a gaming table at a small German Bad. Thus my revenge came to nothing, after all; and perhaps it was best so, for what was I that I should desire to triumph over this man—I who had tried to desert the best friend ever man had in his need? As Cameron turned away I could not help feeling that if those around only knew all they would not think much better of me than of him.

We did not stop long at A—. Melton was far too anxious to return to England, and to satisfy himself with his own eyes of his love's safety and the continuance of her affection, to delay a moment longer than was necessary; I, who had now made up

my mind as to the course I should pursue, intended to accompany him.

It was a dull wet day about the beginning of June when we arrived in London. I knew from my mother where to look for the Meareses, for they had long ago taken up their abode in the capital. We arranged that Hugh should go to his lawyer's to put in his claim to his uncle's property, and to talk over business matters, while I went to Mrs. Meares's lodgings to break the news to Maud that one had indeed returned from the dead, as I murmured to myself, repeating sadly, the words of the Arab's prophecy. He was to follow me thither as quickly as he could, and I hoped fervently his coming would not be long delayed. Once the news was told, I should find each minute passed with her an age of pain till I could make my escape. I drove to the house quickly, though in my state of suspense every moment seemed an hour. What if she should have taught herself to consider him as dead, and to look on me as her future husband; nay, had even perhaps grown to love me? I thought I had heard of such things, and with a beating heart I hoped against hope as I mounted the narrow stairs to her little drawing-room.

But all such hopes, if indeed I ever really entertained them, fled as I met her quiet friendly smile, her frank outstretched hand. There was none of the shy timidity of love, none of its happy gladness visible in those quiet deep eyes. She welcomed me as one welcomes a dear trusted friend, a brother perhaps, but no more. We were alone; so there was nothing to prevent my telling her everything. This I did in as few words as possible, keeping my eyes fixed on one particular bunch of flowers in the pattern of the carpet, and yet seeing distinctly the flush rising in her cheeks, and a troubled look dimming her dear eyes. I could see the trembling of the white hands clasped in her lap, the nervous, hurried breathing and still I spoke on. I spared myself in nothing; I felt almost as if making myself base in her eyes was in some sort doing penance for my betrayal of my friend. I told even of that—of my wicked desire to leave him there to his fate, and could feel her large eyes turned on me with a look of sorrowful reproach. She spoke not a word as I went on to relate what had passed at A—, when suddenly I heard a cab drive to the door. I knew it was Hugh, and rising, said:

"All the rest you will hear from him. You are free forever from the promise I once forced from you. One request only I make of you. Do not let him know that his return stood between me and all that I hold most dear in life. It would mar his happiness and grieve his loving heart if he thought for a moment that his peace had been purchased by the sacrifice of mine. Years may pass before we meet again; till then, farewell!"

"Good friend and true, farewell," she murmured, as she held out her hand to me, with tears floating in her deep soft eyes. I raised it for a moment to my lips, and hurried from the room, feeling as though a light had suddenly been extinguished in my life, and I was left in utter darkness.

On the stairs I met Hugh. "Come and see me at the Army and Navy this evening, old fellow," I said, as I passed out, and in another minute I was once more in the street.

Next day I left town for Cairns, and in two months was once more on my way to India. I heard from my sister that Maud Meares's wedding was a very grand one. "You know," she wrote, "at one time I fancied you liked her, and that even she liked you; but now that your friend, who was always hanging after her, has come into his uncle's property, he has carried the day. What she can see in him now, I cannot think, he is so greatly altered since he went to India. However, he certainly is getting more like his old self every day, and I dare say will soon be quite young and handsome again. She seems wrapped up in him; so perhaps, after all, it was a good thing I was mistaken, and you did not care for her; it would have been a bad thing if you had married her, and he had returned afterward."

Not a pleasant letter to read, was it? though no doubt meant in all kindness; but it helped me to see that I had done the right thing, and that conviction strengthens me to bear the pain of the vague and purposeless longing, the wild regrets for what might have been, that rise, in spite of all efforts to repress them, in my heart, whenever I think of that happy and yet most bitter day when I found my friend and lost my love.

THE END.

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